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THE CLYFFARDS OF CLYFFE.

VOL. I.

REPRINTED FROM "CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL."

THE CLYFFARDS OF CLYFFE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO
MY DEAR MOTHER
THIS BOOK
IS
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

THE Critical Reader who entertains a wholesome horror of "Sensation Novels" is respectfully requested to take notice that this work is avowedly "a Romance"—a species of fiction at one time freely permitted to the British Novelist.

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CHAPTER I.

IN CRAVEN.

“WHO travels by Donnerblick Scars, takes a bad road,” runs a local proverb in Craven; and, like most proverbs, it contains a half-truth. The cart-track is, in fact, so wretched, that it has no right to the name of road, especially, too, since in the winter-time it is not used by man at all, but is in the sole occupation of a mountain torrent. Such being the case even at this present, when Craven (British, *Craigvan*, “District of Rocks”) is the summer haunt of tourists,

demanding to be *carried* everywhere in wheeled conveyances, we may imagine it was no better in the year of grace 1820. At that very date, however, and somewhere about midnight in September, two travellers might have been seen (for luckily for them there was a moon), essaying that ill-reputed way in a gig. Western Yorkshire, as geographers are aware, does not fringe the sea-coast, and yet upon the left hand of the wayfarers arose a wall of cliff, as sheer and massive as any which opposes itself to ocean; scattered fragments of rock, too, similar to those which are found on the sea-beach, strewed the track, and in such numbers as to be unavoidable. What there was of roadway, independent of these, was a natural limestone pavement, with fissures in it at unequal intervals. The

vehicle, one would have thought, must have been made of boxwood at least to have resisted such continuous shocks; and how the springs stood, would have been a marvel to such as were unacquainted with the fact that the gig had no springs.

“Now, Cator, pull up, and let me out,” cried one of the inmates, after a concussion which made every timber in the homely conveyance rattle and creak. “I’d rather get along upon all-fours, if that be necessary, than sit through another jolt like that. Come, let me out, I say.”

The tone was that of would-be determination, that mixture of peremptoriness and conciliation, which is the certain index of a dependent mind. The reply was equally significant of a disposition dogged and obstinate, not easily moulded to another’s hand,

but once being so, fitted to be its instrument for bad or good, without much scruple.

"Sit where ye be, I say. My orders were, I was never to lose hold on ye, for that ye were unfitted to walk alone."

"But look you, sirrah—— Thunder! What a bump! I protest I thought my collar-bone was broken. How dare you talk to me in that fashion? Am not I your master, sir?"

"Ay, ay, that's like enough; but my orders come from the master of both of us. Sit you *down*, I say;" and the driver seized the other's wrist, as he strove to rise, and forced him down with iron grip on to the seat again.

"Well, upon my word, this is pretty treatment," observed the victim querulously;

"it really is, Cator. Why, you couldn't treat me much worse if I was one of the patients."

"Well!" cried the driver, slapping his thigh, "but that is a good one; couldn't treat you much worse!" Here he laughed so loud and harshly, that the mountain-walls were forced, though sullenly enough, to re-echo his cheerless mirth. "Ah, Mr. Clement Carr, but I think I could."

"Don't laugh like that," exclaimed his companion earnestly; "don't do it; pray don't; and don't talk of such things. My brother said we were never to talk of them, even to one another."

"Ah, did he?" replied the man that was called Cator, in a sobered tone. "Well, then, I ax his pardon. Mr. Gideon is a knowing one, he is, else what could be the

harm of talking about any mortal thing on Donnerblick Scars at midnight, with nobody but the devil—who knows all about *us* already, I reckon—within hearing, is more than I can tell, and devilish funny.”

“Cator, be quiet, I say,” interrupted Mr. Carr almost with a scream. “Don’t speak of anything dreadful like that; and don’t swear—for Heaven’s sake, don’t swear—until we come to the turnpike road.”

“Then I shall talk like a parson to the end of this journey, that’s certain, Mr. Clement. There is no turnpike, or anything like it, between this and Clyffe Hall. Why, you’re never satisfied; you ain’t. You didn’t like the moor-track, as we came along, any better, just because it was a little slushy-like.”

“It was a quagmire,” answered the other,

shuddering at the bare recollection; "it was a shaking, quaking swamp."

"Ay, and I know who was a shaking, quaking summut else," replied the other maliciously. "Just in that 'ere place, when I was a-telling you that pretty story about the young woman and her sweetheart, who was lost in that very quag years and years ago, and was dug out since, only the other day, as one might say, all fresh and pleasant, only a trifle browned with the peat, and all of a sudden we plumped in up to the axles—my life, didn't you turn a pretty colour!"

Again Mr. Cator relieved his feelings by peal after peal of discordant laughter, and again the unwilling rocks returned his mirth.

"This is truly horrible," observed Mr. Clement Carr, as he clung in an agony of

terror to the side-rail of the gig, which was now descending a sort of precipice—"to travel such a road as this in company with such a man!"

He spoke in a tone of pious reprobation, such as would have galled most people clothed with any remnant of self-respect. But Mr. Cator, who had long parted with his last rag, only laughed the more. "Well, of all the lily-livered chaps as ever I came across, strike me blind—but you are——"

"Don't," groaned the other, the image of his companion, sightless, immediately presenting itself before him. "There's lightning in the air. Pray, don't. How should I ever find my way alone out of this howling wilderness?"

"Ay, howling it is," rejoined the driver, looking over his shoulder grimly at his

unconscious companion—a short but corpulent man of middle age, who might be termed “gentleman,” so far as a new suit of black broadcloth and a decent hatband could carry him towards that social elevation—“you never spoke a truer word than that, Mr. Clement. Have you not heard strange sounds ever since we passed the Kirkstane, like the rushing and rolling of thunder?”

“Yes, Cator, yes. I thought—and hoped—it was only a sort of singing in my own ears. What is it, my good friend?—What on earth is it?”

“It’s nothing on Earth, Mr. Clement,” responded the other gravely; “it’s the waters underneath us on their way to Hell Gates.”

“Heaven forgive me, the man’s gone

mad!" ejaculated the stout man, the thin red lines which were his lips growing white with fear.

"Well, and what if I *was* mad, Mr. Clement?" pursued the other with a leer. "You would know how to quiet me, I suppose, as well as any man except Mr. Gideon; that is to say, you would if you had me at the Dene, although here, perhaps, I should rather have the advantage of you, being the more powerful of the two. My life, but it would be a pretty game if you were to be paid out for all your tricks in that very way! Think of one of those poor wretches whom we have left behind us yonder catching you here alone, under the harvest-moon, and settling his long account against you, for——"

"You're not to talk about it, Cator ;

you're not to talk about it," interrupted the other piteously; "and besides, we do it all for their good; and if I do but get safe home, it shall never be done again, so help me—it never shall!"

"Well, you are a clever one," observed the driver, admiringly, "and you've a certain pluck about you—that I will say, although you are such an everlasting coward. Now, to think of your attempting to gammon Providence in that way! It's a cut above *me*, and that's a fact. I shouldn't have the face to set about it. Why, you know as well as I do that if you only get safe out of this bad road and indifferent company, and once find yourself in clover again at the Dene, you'll be worse than ever; for won't you be taking it out of them as is left, for all the terrors you have suffered

in bringing this news of 'our dear lamented friend as has exchanged our 'umble guardianship for a place where we are assured even yet more tender care will be taken of him!'" The sanctimonious snuffle with which these last words were delivered, proclaimed them at once to be a quotation from Mr. Clement Carr himself, whose ordinary speech, when not under the influence of alarm, it really rather happily parodied. So delighted, at all events, was Mr. Cator with the success of the imitation, that he indulged himself with another of his joyless screeches. This was duly reverberated, as usual, with the addition of a curious humming sound not discernible in the original. "There," observed Mr. Cator, triumphantly; "that's what comes of trying to gammon Providence. There's Hell Gates a-biling."

"I trust the ground may not open," ejaculated the stout man, piously—"I only trust the ground mayn't open with using such wicked words."

"But that's the very thing it's a-going to do," returned the other with a sneer; "so what's the use of trusting? Here we are, look, at the very edge of Boden Pot—otherwise called Hell Gates—and it's a sight to be seen. Ain't the ground just opened with a vengeance, eh, Mr. Clement?"

Upon the right-hand side of the cart-track, and separated from it by no fence of any kind, gaped a huge elliptical chasm, far down in which the unseen water was bubbling and simmering, as though it indeed did boil.

"Would you not like to step out now,

and just crane over a bit?" inquired the last speaker, maliciously, pulling the powerful black mare he drove so suddenly up, that she reared within a few feet of the frightful cavity. "Why, darned if the man isn't shutting his eyes!—shutting his eyes, but moving his lips. Why, you ain't a-gammoning Providence *again*, surely! There, that's right; take a good long look at it. People come from miles away, and spend a deal o' money to see Boden Pot, even when it ain't a-biling as it is to-night. But you're in luck, you are."

If Mr. Clement Carr, part-proprietor of that famous private asylum for the nobility and gentry of aberrated intellect, called the Dene, Yorkshire, was in luck upon the present occasion, his countenance exhibited no vulgar triumph, or even complacency.

In fact, if we had not had the word of the veracious Mr. Cator to the contrary, one would have pronounced him to have been in the worst luck conceivable, so abject was his appearance, as, clinging to his favourite rail, and bowing his whole weight on the side of the gig most remote from the object of his terrors, he regarded the curious natural phenomenon thus presented to his notice.

“I was born and bred in Craven myself,” continued the keeper—for such was the position which the driver of the vehicle occupied when at the Dene—“and yet I have never seen this sight but once before. There must have been a deal of rain on the moors of late, that’s certain. There’s always rain enough, of course; for all the underground rivers as you have heard

a-rushing beneath you—the singing in your ears, as you called it—empty themselves here. But as for biling, that's rare."

"I have quite satisfied my curiosity, Cator," observed Mr. Carr in a hollow voice, and speaking with no little difficulty, on account of a tendency of his tongue to cleave to the roof of his mouth.

"Very good, sir," replied the other with mock respect. "I am sure your wish is my law; only, Mr. Gideon said I was to take the greatest care of this here mare; and she's come a long way and wants rest; and here's a nice bit of level ground—there's not much of it in Craven—as seems to be put a-purpose for her to rest upon. I'm sure you wouldn't be cruel to animals, Mr. Clement; cruelty is something totally foreign to your nature; 'our system is opposed to

violence of all description,'” here he snuffled again, “so let us bide a bit, and wait for the Boggart.”

“The Boggart!” whispered Mr. Clement, hoarsely, casting an apprehensive glance about him for an instant, and then refixing his gaze upon the chasm, as though fascinated by its horrid depths, “what is the Boggart?”

“When I have lit my pipe,” returned Mr. William Cator, suiting the action to the word, “I shall be delighted to give you all the information in my power. What a (puff, whiff) fortunate man you are to visit Craven for the first time with a guide like me.”

CHAPTER II.

POST-MORTEM ADVENTURE OF MR. GUY CLYFFARD.

“**T**HE Boggart,” commenced Mr. William Cator, calmly, “is what is more generally known as the Devil; but while he is in these parts, he goes by the former name, as a sort of territorial title. When he is not elsewhere, hereabouts—at Staynton Hole, Ribbleside Pit (which you should see by the bye), or Withgill Wells, all country seats of his in these parts—he is sure to be in Boden Pot. See how white the water churns down yonder, just where the moon catches it, like the froth on a madman’s lips.

One hundred and eighty feet sheer they say, Mr. Clement, from where the rank grass ceases to grow; and there at the very edge do you see a footprint deep in the stone, with the toes pointing *downwards*?"

Following the direction of the speaker's finger, his companion could just discover a bare spot something of the shape of a human foot. The suggestion of a fellow-creature having ever stood in such a position might have sent a chill to a bolder heart than Mr. Carr's.

"I see, I see—it is too frightful," answered he hastily; "it looks like certain death."

"I should think it did," remarked Mr. Cator, drily; "and it would have been death, too, if the man had not been dead already."

“Dead already?” echoed the other. “How could a dead man plant a footstep like that?”

“Ah! how, indeed, Mr. Clement? You must ask the judge before whom the case was tried a century and half ago. Now, think of your not knowing that, and you a relative by marriage of the party in question! I don’t mean the Boggart—although I *have* seen you under circumstances when you might have passed for own brother to *him*—but Guy Clyffard of Clyffe, an ancestor of the very man whose sudden and deplorable death——”

“Heaven is my witness that could not be helped,” interrupted his companion earnestly. “He brought it upon himself, Cator. It was a question of his life or ours. Don’t you think the mare is sufficiently rested, my good

friend? The moon is sinking; it is getting sensibly darker."

"Did not I *say* 'sudden and deplorable,' Mr. Clement? Why, you could not have caught me up more sharply, if I had hinted at a crowner's 'quest. Guy Clyffard, then, was a far-away ancestor, although in the direct line, of our late lamented friend and patient; and if there had been such an establishment as the Dene in those days, ought most certainly to have been placed there under—what is our phrase?—judicious moral restraint. But there was no benevolent institution of the kind then extant, and so this mad fellow went at large. I can't tell you what he did, or rather what he did not do, to make Satan his friend, but it is certain he brought the Curse upon the Clyffards. There's an ugly story


about his having left a mother and child in the caves under Ribble Forest yonder, to find their way out by themselves; but at all events, he was not a moral character, like you and me. He married a queer wife, too. The Clyffards have often done that, although it is only of late years that they have married beneath them—nay, don't be angry, Mr. Clement; I mean no offence to Miss Grace as was—but in that respect Guy Clyffard outdid them all. No pair were ever so cordially hated as they by the whole Fell-side. Well, after a pretty long lease of life, and having sowed his full crop of tares, as a parson would say, the Squire fell sick, and was not expected to recover. About that time, on a certain day in June, one Mr. Howarth (his family live in Thorpdale yet) was otter-hunting in

Boden Beck—it breaks into the open both above and below the Pot here, and is still famed for otters—and there was a matter of four-and-twenty folks with him on foot and on horseback. While they were at check, not a hundred yards from where we are standing now, a couple of men came running up the Fell with exceeding swiftness.

“‘These be well winded,’ said Howarth to his huntsman; ‘never did I see men run so fast before.’

“‘Why, Heaven save us! the one in grey is Squire Guy Clyffard,’ replied the huntsman. ‘And who is he in black that follows him so close?’

“But nobody answered that, although all the hunt had got their eyes fixed upon the advancing pair. They ran on at headlong



speed right towards the Pot (it was not called Hell Gates *then*), and Guy's face looked like a hunted hare's they said, so it is like he knew who was behind him; then he fled down the cleft, though all cried out to him to stop, and into the yawning gulf, as if for shelter, and that was his last footstep which is printed there. There was no other mark or sign, though the man in black took the same road. Clyffard's Leap they sometimes call it. There was no more otter-hunting after that; but Howarth goes straight home, and tells his wife he is sure the Squire is dead, for he has just seen him chased by the devil into Boden Pot. And sure enough he had breathed his last in Clyffe Hall at that very time. You may suppose how this was talked of over all the Fell-side; so much

so, that Madam Clyffard, the widow, she brought her action against Mr. Howarth for publishing the scandal, that he had seen her deceased husband driven into hell; and the defence set up was this, *that he had so seen him*. She laid the damages at five thousand pounds. It was tried before Judge Boltby at York in 1637. The witnesses for Madam were the doctor and other two, who had been with the squire when he died. He had refused to go to bed, and insisted upon being dressed in a new gray hunting-suit, in which to take the field the moment he felt better. But Howarth, on his part, had his four-and-twenty men, of whom the huntsman and many others swore to the very buttons on the said suit, which they had observed were covered with the same sort of cloth where-

of the coat was made. It was impossible to resist such testimony; and the judge gave into it like the rest. 'Lord have mercy upon me!' said he, 'and grant I may never see what you have seen: one or two may be mistaken, but five-and-twenty cannot be mistaken.' So Madam Clyffard lost her cause."

"But the Boggart!" exclaimed Mr. Clement, enthralled, despite his terrors, by this singular narrative.

"Well, the Boggart has haunted Boden ever since. Do you see these stones, as large as eggs, which he has cast up from the water in his rage; and listen, you will hear him cursing to himself far down in the depths of Hell Gates."

The bubbling and boiling had by this time subsided, but as the pair listened

attentively, a dull, monotonous sound—doubtless the glutting of the swollen pool against the rock—could be distinctly heard. The two men listened for a little in total silence, then “Come up, mare—come up,” ejaculated Mr. William Cator; “master has had enough of the Boggart.”

Master had had so much of him, that he never spoke a word until the dark and perilous way lay well behind them, and they were moving swiftly along upon what was by comparison a level road.

“Are there no more boulders, or underground rivers, or Potts, William?” inquired Mr. Clement Carr, with assumed carelessness.

“Nothing more, sir,” replied his companion, with some tinge of conventional respect apparent in his tones for the first

time. "I thought you would think it rather a wild journey over them Fells."

"If I ever come that accursed road again," exclaimed Mr. Clement, breathing very hard, and shaking his fist in the direction from which they came, "may the Fiend in truth fly away with me, as those otter-hunting fools fancied they saw him——"

"I say," interrupted Mr. William Cator, checking his steed for the second time, "just you take care what you're talking about."


"Why? where? what?" interrogated the other, apprehensively. "You told me that there was nothing more to be alarmed at."

"Don't you go making a jest in the place we're coming to of what happened to Guy Clyffard, Mr. Clement. The Clyffards

are an old family, and hug their traditions after a fashion which you mayn't understand. They're particular proud, I believe, of the ancestor who brought the Curse upon them. If he didn't go downward by way of Boden Pot, it is certain that he took some other road to the same place; but it was a fine thing, and a compliment to the Ulyffards to be fetched by the Prince of Darkness."

"I am sure they are welcome to any superstitions they please," observed the other with a grating laugh. "Folly of that sort is always a step in the right direction, and I trust that one member of the family, at least, may always qualify himself for a residence at the Dene."

"Ay, you may call it superstition, Mr. Clement Carr; but if you had lived boy



and man for a quarter of a century within a mile of Clyffe Hall, you would not be so glib with your tongue."

"You are an ignorant and uneducated man, Cator," returned the other loftily, "and therefore such credulity, fostered by local prejudice, is in your case only natural."

"Very good, Mr. Clement," answered the other drily. "Perhaps we shall differ less about this matter to-morrow morning."

"Why to-morrow morning less than now, my good Cator?" inquired the other, with an air of careless patronage.

"Because you will have slept upon it, sir, which is said to often alter a man's opinion, and more especially as you will have done so in Clyffe Hall."

"But there's nothing against the Hall,

my good Cator, is there? Mrs. Clyffard has never breathed a syllable of anything unpleasant?"

"Nothing, sir, nothing, except those tales which 'credulity, fostered by local prejudice,' is so apt to invent, and which 'ignorant and uneducated' folks are so ready to believe.—But yonder is Clyffe Hall itself: we shall have a couple of hours' sleep before daybreak yet, if we push on."

"I shall not go to bed to-night," said Mr. Clement Carr decisively; "it would scarcely be worth while."

Mr. William Cator chuckled aloud.

"And look you, Cator, perhaps our staying in the house may be looked upon as an intrusion at this period of family affliction. To-morrow night we will sleep at the inn."

“There *is* no inn, Mr. Clement,” returned the driver maliciously. “Here are the lodge gates; please to hold the reins, while I get out and ring the bell.”

CHAPTER III.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

IT was the quietest hour of the twenty-four, as we in our egotism are wont to speak, as though it were not far otherwise with the majority of our fellow-creatures on this orb, and busy mid-day with our own flesh and blood in the Under world. The high harvest-moon at full was flooding the silent woods with mellow light, and crowning the eternal hills with solemn splendour. Through the iron gates, the avenue stretched far and wide, and the broad oaks threw each a shadow of itself

on the eastern sward, as perfect as though it were a cast mantle. At the end of the long vista rose the midmost tower of Clyffe Hall; and on both sides, beyond the trees, vast masses of the stately mansion, or at least of its girdling terrace, could be seen, sleeping in the moonbeams like some enchanted pile of fairyland. Around it spread the park, wooded and knowled, the ferny couching-place of many an antlered herd; and behind it, as far as eye could range, rose the dark background of Ribble Forest and Fell. It was a scene to make the lightest-hearted thoughtful, and yet, if viewed aright, to lighten the burden of the most sorrowful. It matters not which sort beholds it, or if neither does. Autumn after autumn, age after age, the innocent Night wears still this precious jewel of the harvest-

moon upon her brow; and the soft effulgence overflows the world, and steeps it in heavenly splendour, whether mortals care to mark it or no; as the Urim and Thummim shone the same, whether he who looked upon them perceived the presence of the Lord of Hosts, or only beheld a burnished breastplate.

Alike upon the crowded towns it shines, where the children of honest Labour sleep unconscious of it, and those of Vice flaunt in the streets unheedful of it; as upon the lonely desolate moorlands, where there is none to gaze upon its lavish sheen. Whatever it bathes in its mild radiance, straight grows fair, except the faces of the Wicked. Fat and afraid, irresolute and cruel, Clement Carr sat in the springless gig looking like a vulgar Vitellius. The countenance of Mr.

William Cator, also, who did not contrive to awaken the lodge-keeper (although he hung on to the bell as though he were taking part in a bob major) with his first, nor yet his second summons, was harsh and grim as the stone deer-hounds that sat on either side the portal. When the gates were opened at last, he lashed the mare into a gallop, as though she had been the cause of their long detention. Still, even these men, as they emerged from the double line of oaks, standing like sentinels whose officer of the Watch was Time itself, and beheld the various proportions of the castle (for such in truth it was), each significant of its epoch, but harmonised one with the other by the revolving years—even these men, I say, could not restrain a characteristic outburst of admiration. It was not, indeed, the

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picturesqueness of this edifice, girt by its broad black belt the sleeping moat, and far less any of the historical associations which might have hallowed it from turret to basement to some folks, that claimed their regard, but the more practical consideration of how considerable an income the proprietor of such a domain must needs possess, who could keep it in such due order and repair; for old as Clyffe Hall was, there was not a vestige of ruin about it; the lawns that sloped down to the moat-side were smoothly shorn, and set with banks of flowers; and from the stone terrace above them, faced with fruit-trees, came news of a trim rose garden, in every odorous breath of the cool autumn air.

"Fine place, Cator," observed Mr. Carr, as they drove over the stone bridge, but

thinly covered with ivy, which only of late years had replaced the less convenient draw-bridge. He spoke not only approvingly but with a certain air of part proprietorship, which did not escape his companion's attention.

"Very true, Mr. Clement," returned he. "It's been in the family in one shape or another more than five hundred years. They say it grew to this, bit by bit, from a single tower—that to the west, I think it was, where the walls are sixteen feet thick, and the windows mere holes with bars to them—wonderfully convenient for *our* little business, eh, Mr. Clement? But these great places don't change hands very readily. You may smile in your mischief-full way, and Miss Grace, as was, is doubtless a very clever woman; but the Clyffards of Clyffe


— Strike me blind, but that's the blood-hounds! Well, I own it made my heart go pit-a-pat. Did you ever hear such a howling in your life? It really seemed as though they had overheard us, and guessed what we were thinking of. Them very blood-hounds, or leastways their fathers before them, have been here these three hundred years. Not even a puppy, they say, has ever been parted with by the family; only a full-grown one was killed by the king's order, or something like it, for eating the gatekeeper's child in Squire Guy's time. He swore it was such a piece of tyranny as he would never put up with; but the dog was hung for all that; and the story goes that his master buried him in the chapel yonder, and got excommunicated by his priests for so doing. Hang the dogs; I

hope their chains are strong! Well, it's one way of rousing the house, at all events."

The feelings of Mr. Clement Carr (who sat on the side next the kennel) did not admit of articulate speech; but he got down with much more agility than could have been expected of a gentleman of his proportions, and running round the back of the gig, applied himself to the iron knocker of the nail-studded front door with a will. The courtyard in which they now were was formed by three sides of the castle, which stared upon them from a score of curtained windows, as from sightless eyes; but through both shutter and curtain of one of them gleamed a pale and sickly light, telling of wakefulness and watching even at that slumberous hour.

“That is Squire Ralph’s own chamber,” observed Mr. Cator, nodding cautiously in the direction in question; “and if you’ll take the advice of so humble an individual as myself, you will not make such a dreadful noise.”

The shocks which Mr. Carr was administering to the oaken door did indeed reverberate over the whole building; and the baying of the blood-hounds, mixed with the rattle of chains as they strained to break their bonds, made up a hideous clamour. The latter noise, however, only incited Mr. Clement to fresh exertions; and when the door was suddenly opened in front of him, he rushed frantically in, crying, “The dogs, the dogs! Shut it, lock it; never mind Cator!” without even casting a glance at the person who had admitted him. If his




alarm had permitted him to do so, it would probably have taken another direction.

He who stood in the doorway, glancing in speechless indignation from the intruder in the gig to him who had made so unceremonious an entrance, was evidently no serving-man. His face, though haggard, and, at the moment, puckered with rage, wore an air of conscious superiority very different from the well-weighed superciliousness of a hall-porter; while his apparel, although dishevelled, as though he had sought repose (as indeed he had) without undressing, was rich, and even elegant. But what rendered him most peculiar, and put it out of the question that he could be merely a retainer of the establishment, was that he wore his hair, of which he had an enormous quantity, notwithstanding that he was far

advanced in years, in plaits, as race-horses do in these days, and from out of them his gray face peered inquiringly, as a river-god's is sometimes pictured to do from his fell of bulrushes.

"How dare you make this clamour at my door?" he broke forth after a while. "Who are you, fellow, in the gig, and who is this cur whom you have brought with you?"

His inquiry was addressed to Mr. William Cator, but referred to Mr. Clement Carr, who, having climbed up to the huge marble mantelpiece of the hall by means of a chair, had cleverly kicked it over, so as to isolate himself from all attacks of blood-hounds or others; and there he sat, with his legs swinging from the impetus of his exertions, but by no means from the



careless confidence which sometimes begets that motion in persons similarly circumstanced.

"My name is Cator, sir," returned the driver, baring his head, and speaking with unwonted humility. "We have just come over from the Dene."

"I might have known it," muttered Ralph Clyffard gravely, for it was the Squire of Clyffe Hall himself who stood before them. "Have I not been forwarned these three times?"—Then he added aloud, "Come in, sirrah; a groom will take your horse. When did my poor brother Cyril die?"

"We regret to say, sir," quoth Mr. Clement Carr from the mantelpiece—"I speak for Gideon and myself—that the sudden and deplorable demise of Cyril Clyffard, Esq., took place yesterday after-

noon at twenty-seven minutes and a half exactly to four o'clock."

"Come down, sir, and tell your tidings in a fitting manner!" cried Ralph Clyffard in a terrible voice. "Could no messenger be found to bring such evil news to Clyffe Hall less like an ape than this?"

Thus adjured, but by no means displaying the nimbleness of the animal to which he had been likened, Mr. Clement descended from his post of vantage.

"The poor gentleman had had paroxysms for nearly a week, sir. His unhappy mad lady——"

"Stop!" thundered the master of the house; "not another word if you value your life. Rupert, my son, what is it?"

The change in Ralph Clyffard's tone, as he spoke the last few words, was


like a summer south wind after a tornado. He addressed them to a youth of about eighteen, who had just entered the hall with a lamp in his hand; he had a dressing-gown loosely cast about him, as though he had just left his couch, and his large blue eyes wandered wildly and inquiringly from his father to the strangers. Accompanying him was another lad about a year his junior, whose appearance afforded a singular contrast to that of the former. They were both well-favoured, but whereas the elder was a true young Saxon, auburn-haired and ruddy, with the silver down upon his cheek already turning to golden, the younger might have been born under an Italian sky, so dark and passionate his eyes, so bronzed his face from brow to pointed chin.

“I was waked by the knocking, father,”

replied the youth who was called Rupert; "and Ray said he was sure he heard voices in the hall; and so Ray and I——"

"Will go quietly to bed again," interrupted a woman's voice with quiet decision.

The speaker had entered noiselessly by some door in that part of the great hall which lay in shadow, so that it was impossible to say how long she might have been there. But she now glided forward into the full light of the moonbeams—really a wonderful vision. She was a blonde, such as might well have been Rupert's mother, but that she was much too young—about eight-and-twenty at most—yet she had no likeness to the boy beyond that of complexion, while her expression was singularly different. In Rupert's eyes there was a look of indecision, of va-



cillation, almost painful to contemplate; while those of the lady shone clear and steadfast as a star. Her mouth, too, was firm and resolute, although, when she smiled, this did no mar its sweetness; and her voice, though somewhat incisive, was clear and musical as a struck stalactite.

"Both to bed, my good lads," continued she; "these persons are not robbers, that your assistance is needed; while whatever news they bring will keep till breakfast-time."

The lads retired, although reluctantly, with their faces to their inexorable step-mother (for such she was); and not until their footsteps had died away along the vaulted stone passage, did she again break silence.

"Cyril is dead, I conclude," said she.

Ralph bowed his head, overcome with

sorrowful thought; but when she drew close to him, and placed her fragile hand in his, he carried it to his lips, and kissed it tenderly. As he did so, she, with the air of one to whom sovereign favour is nothing new, inclined graciously towards the messenger.

“How did it happen? Tell me, Clement.”

“For these three days past” [the husband and wife exchanged a meaning glance] “the poor gentleman has been getting worse and worse; at last he grew very violent. Gideon visited him as usual yesterday afternoon, and Mr. Clyffard seized the opportunity of the open door to rush out, and cast himself over the well-staircase. He was killed on the spot.”

Ralph hid his face, and shuddered.

"That will do," said he; "I will hear more at another time. The servants are now aroused, and will see that you want for nothing. I am sorry that I spoke to you so roughly, sir;" and with a stately inclination of his head, Ralph Clyffard moved thoughtfully away.

"Why is not Gideon here?" inquired Mrs. Clyffard, her beautiful lips shutting close together, as soon as she had spoken, like a purse with a coral clasp.

"He is hurt," answered Clement shortly. "They had a struggle for it, he and the other."

"I thought so," answered the woman quietly. "He must have been hurt, indeed, not to have come himself. It is very unfortunate."

"Well, I am sure I had rather he had

come than I," answered Clement sullenly. "Such a dreadful road as we had to travel, and not much of a welcome at the end of it, from one's own sister. Why, I believe your husband thought at first that I was no more a gentleman than Cator here."

"I daresay he did," returned Mrs. Clyffard drily. "My husband is very peculiar."

"Peculiar!" echoed Mr. Carr. "I think so indeed. Why, his hair alone is enough to frighten one. He ought to be at the Dene himself; I'm sure he is mad enough."

"Hush!" returned the lady imperatively. "You will have an excellent breakfast, Clement, and whatever you please to call for in Clyffe Hall is at your service; see, then, that you make yourself at home—so well, that you need not remember that you

have any other home. Speak not one word about the Dene. You will find attendance yonder."

She shot one look of intelligence towards Cator, which was returned swifter than shuttlecock, and followed her husband to his chamber.

"That's pretty treatment of a brother," ejaculated Clement, but not until she was well out of earshot. "It is to be hoped that something's coming of it all at last, for I'm sure we've had enough to put up with."

"You have had your revenge, too, Mr. Clement," observed the other grimly.

"*One* has paid for it," answered Vitellius with an ugly look; "but the indebtment is upon the wrong side still. I am longing for the day when we shall cry quits."

“The matter is in good hands,” returned the keeper of lunatics; “Miss Grace as was is a clever woman; and in the meantime let us punish the larder.”

CHAPTER IV.

AUNT AND NIECE.

THE morning that witnessed the arrival of the messengers from the Dene was many hours older when Mrs. Clyffard sat down to breakfast in her own boudoir, attired in deepest black, and wearing an air, if not of respectful sorrow, at least of serious thought. Through the deep bay-window she could mark from where she sat the golden raiment of the autumn woods of Clyffe, and the windings of its well-stocked stream, from its beginning the thread of pearl, which, like a long necklace, now hid,

now seen, upon a maiden's bosom, decked the swelling Fell, down to the far distance, where, a river broad and shining, it yet was lost in the misty plain. Many a mile it ran before her, and all its course was fair; whether with the moorcock and ptarmigan upon the heathery hill, or in the rocky dells of the Park, where the gentle does strayed down to know their beauty, or in the broad rich level beyond, white with farms, and yellow with grain. It was the plain which pleased her best, because it was the richest; for it was greed that kindled in Grace Clyffard's eyes, as she gazed upon that lordly scene. All was hers as far as those eyes could range, to live in and be mistress of; but if the proud demesnes of Clyffe had stretched thrice as far, she would have hungared still

for more. All was hers, but for her life only—to enjoy, but not to possess. True, she concerned herself with this life alone, credited it alone, never hoped or thought (although she sometimes dreamed, in spite of herself) of anything beyond it; moreover, she only loved herself, and therefore it could matter nothing into whose hands this wealth should pour, when hers must needs unloose it. Nevertheless, it was that thought which darkened her fair face, and marred her brow, as she gazed forth upon this scene, whose peaceful beauty should have found its own reflection there—to enjoy, but not to possess. “Nay,” answered those tight shut lips, “but that cannot be. I must possess before I can enjoy it.” She beat her little foot against the floor, once, twice, and yet again, but not in

passion ; whatever stirred the depths of her subtle heart, rarely indeed was evidenced upon the surface. There was one answering rap from beneath, and after an interval, a side-door opened behind her, and a young girl entered the room. Mrs. Clyffard did not even turn her head, but sat with her rapt gaze still fixed upon the view without.

"Breakfast waits, Mildred," said she thoughtfully. "You are late this morning. Have you heard the news from the Dene?"

"Yes, aunt," replied the girl. "Mr. Cyril Clyffard is dead."

"Ay, child ; the ground behind us then at least is safe. Madmen are said to become sane men sometimes, and stretch their fettered hands again for what was once

their own; but the dead lay claim to nothing. Ralph Clyffard is lord of Clyffe at last. I place my feet firm on the second step; but it is still far to climb.—Do you feel strong, child?”

She did not speak these words as a mother would have done. It was her contemptuous habit to address her niece as “child,” and she used it now mechanically, when no contempt was meant.

“I am strong enough, aunt—for a child,” replied Mildred Leigh coldly. “What would you have me do?”

Swift as a snake, the lady of Clyffe turned round and placed her face quite close to that of her niece, as she sat at table, so near that not a quiver of the lip, not a trembling of an eyelid could escape her gaze.

“Listen, Mildred; you are no fool, although you would fain that I should take you for one. You are not a baby either. Girls have been wooed and won, ay, and been widowed too, before they have reached your age. You know for what those lustrous eyes have been given you—and how to use them. You do not plait that raven hair so cunningly to please yourself alone. Boys like that colour always”—she glanced aside in a mirror, glistening in the oaken panel like floating ice on a dark sea, at her own auburn tresses—“but ’tis the blonde that lasts. You will be gray, child, before me. Your time is short, young as you think yourself—beware lest you misuse it. Look you, because Ralph Clyffard wears his hair like you, and having cellars filled with goodly wine, persists in drinking water

from the spring, and lives in a half-dream, through poring on his ancestors, and looking for their Curse to fall on him and his, you think perhaps that he himself is mad."

"I, aunt? Nay, not *I*!"

"Who, then, child? Who has dared to think my husband mad? Your face does not pay compliments. Was he mad to marry *me*?" A twitching at the corner of the girl's mouth—the hint of the beginning of a smile—had brought this question swift as the quivering wire upon a tower draws the lightning. "Well, and what then? Are not all men mad to marry? By Heaven, if I were male, I'd call my house my own, my purse my own; nor would I have children praying for my death, or heirs of any kind. I would not buy the best of wives at such a price. And yet, I

suppose, you think there is no man so rich but that he might give both land and gold to make *you* his, and yet be no spend-thrift."

"I have never thought about it, aunt," replied Mildred Leigh, colourless as virgin marble before some sculptor who would fain hew it to his purpose. Not a muscle moved, and the long lashes of her eyes drooped down almost as if in slumber.

"You lie—you lie!" returned Mrs. Clyfard, slowly. "Not thought about it, and a girl! Why, girls think of nothing else. Why not confess it, Mildred? You have some right to value yourself highly. Are you not my niece—the nearest to the mistress of Clyffe Hall? Are you not a lady born? Can you not paint? Can you not play? Ah, what a lure is there—the

rounded arm thrown round the golden harp, the fingers twinkling on the jet-black keys! Can you not sing as any siren can? What would a man have more? But, mark! if you had known none of these fine things, but scarcely could read a line out of a book; or if you could, would have had none to listen to you, since all were rude and cultureless about you; your father a boor, dead in a drunken brawl; your mother an evil memory; your brothers hated by all who knew them, and most hated by those who knew them best—driving a base trade basely: if this had been your fortune—as it was *mine*, child—you might have said indeed: ‘Should any man of rank and wealth—let alone a Clyffard, the proudest and the richest in all the country-side—propose to marry me, and take

me from this sordid roof, and make me mistress of his ancestral home, he surely must be mad.' So, niece, when I saw you smile, or thinking of a smile just now, when I said, 'Was he mad to marry *me*?' I was neither angered nor surprised."

"Nay, aunt," answered the girl in a deprecating tone, "I meant nothing like that indeed. But having heard you say yourself that Uncle Ralph was likely some day to"—

"Never, Mildred!" interrupted Mrs. Clyffard—"never, never! You are mistaken. You never heard me say so; and if you dreamed you heard me, see you forget that dream. Ralph Clyffard is sane enough, but he will not live long."—Mildred pushed aside her plate, its contents almost untouched, and sank back in her chair with her hand

pressed to her brow.—“Nay, I wish I could think otherwise, child,” continued her aunt coldly. “There is no life—not yours or Gideon’s—which I can afford so ill to lose just now as his. But he has not many years, perhaps months, to pass at his beloved Clyffe. When I am widowed here—well-dowered though I be, and free to live my life out at the Hall—things will be altered; I shall be no longer mistress. Rupert will be bringing home some smooth-faced, smooth-tongued wife, who swears she loves the books that are his idols. Or Raymond will have free quarters at the Hall for some still more hateful mate—a gipsy from the forest, like as not, some large-limbed Fury, whom I shall have to poison.” Her hands closed tightly as she spoke, so that the pink nails of her fingers

stabbed her delicate flesh, and she threw open the casement, as if for air. But for that, she must needs have seen Mildred's tell-tale bosom palpitate, and the colour rush impetuously over cheek and brow. But the lady of Clyffe had passions of her own to hide, and kept her face averted, though she spoke on. "Where I have ruled, I will rule still to the end; and it is you who must help me to do so, as the mouse helped the lion in the fable." She paused, as if waiting for a reply, but no answer coming, save in the quick throbbings of the girl's heart, inaudible to her aunt, although to her own terrified ears they seemed to fill the room with sound, Mrs. Clyffard added, "Do you know *how* you must help me, Mildred?"

"No, aunt."

"By being a dutiful and faithful daughter-in-law. You must marry Rupert Clyffard, and that soon."

"But I do not love him, aunt."

"So much the better, niece. Your judgment, when you come to rule him, will be the less likely to be blinded."

"But he does not love *me*," faltered the girl.

"Even if such were the case," answered Mrs. Clyffard coldly, "there are means to make him, without using love-potions. But he does love you, and you know it, Mildred; for *I* know it, and you must needs have learned it before me. When he took your hand in the Oak Gallery but yesterday, and strove to kiss it—pshaw, never blush for that; it was only I who witnessed it—you were right not to suffer him.

You did very well; but do not say that Rupert is indifferent to you. That was not the first love-passage between you two, as I presume. Ay, so I thought. Why, what a trembling dove is this, that the very mention of her future mate should flutter her thus !”

Mildred Leigh did tremble, yet not with the timidity of love, but rather as the Dove cowers and quails over whom the Hawk is poisoning, and threatening to stoop.

“‘By my faith,’ as the Clyffards say, although I doubt whether one of them ever had enough to swear by, but you play the maiden prettily. Only, look you, Mildred,” added her aunt, changing her tone of raillery to one of sharpest earnest, “do not overact it; or rather, keep your more frigid moods for me, but to your lover

thaw a little. You may let him kiss your hand next time—not snatch your fingers away, as though his lips were springes. I thought to have had a very different rôle to support, girl, when I brought you to Clyffe Hall last year; I deemed you would want a Duenna or Mistress Prudence to say, ‘Hang back, hang back.’ Why, there is not a handsomer lad than Rupert Clyffard betwixt this and Carel, and fitted with all the graces that are dear to fools of your age; while, as for those matters to which a woman, if a wise one, sets her mind, there is scarcely a better match in all the north. ‘What luck was mine,’ say all folks here, yet yours is twice as good. Ralph Clyffard was neither young nor fair to look upon; and he had sons—another woman’s sons—and Cyril was alive;

while you, you moping, milk-faced fool, beware how you anger me with tears! I have not got thus far upon my way to be balked by a girl's mad fancy. Mad? There never was a Clyffard half so mad as you would be if you said 'No' to Rupert; for if you lose him, Mildred—who are poor as any beggar, dependent on my bounty for your very garments—you lose all you see from yonder casement—Wealth; and Station, that makes the proudest smile upon you; and Power, that bends the stiff neck of the poor; and you gain—Mildred, be sure of this—a life-long enemy in one who never yet has failed to work her will!"

"I know it well," answered Mildred, hopelessly. "I will endeavour not to shrink; I will strive to love your step-son. Rupert."

"I care not for that, girl; strive you to marry him. Now, get you gone, for I have webs to weave that demand my most deliberate thought. This Carr here, he is your uncle, child, but not your equal. Give him your finger tips, but not to kiss. Be cold and stately to him, and especially in the presence of Ralph Clyffard. Do not fear lest this should anger him; it will be easy enough to be affable when you have become great: for a smooth word from one who is in honour heals all."

CHAPTER V.

THE HEIR AND THE HEIR-PRESUMPTIVE.

THERE is nothing more strange than that the aspect of external nature, as beautiful many thousand years ago as on this enchanted morning (which, so fresh and fair it is, might well be the first that ever broke on human vision), was cared for nothing at all till within the last three hundred years; that the common glories of sea and land, offered alike to lord and vassal, should have been by both rejected and ignored. To our far back ancestors, a yellow primrose was a yellow primrose, and nothing

more; and if any other flower ever awoke in them reflections too deep for tears, they have carefully concealed the circumstance. Doubtless there must have been persons born with some spiritual discernment of natural beauties; the scarred sea-rocks were not merely horrid to all; a forest must have been suggestive to some of other things besides the chase; a mountain stream of more than a creel of fish. Nay, some mute inglorious Wordsworth, it is probable, existed in all those generations, which have left us scarcely one wood-note wild concerning the scenes which lay about them, as now about ourselves. Did they then love no birds but such as were good for table? Were their parks only fair because their venison grew therein? Some we know thanked God for the early Sun-

rise, that enabled them to start betimes upon a successful foray—thanked Him, that is, for luck in larceny (by no means ‘petty’)—but did men ever thank Him for the Sunrise itself, “the awful Rose of Dawn?” Was it the premature birth of what is called “the love of the Picturesque,” which caused them to lay out hideous gardens, trim and true as measuring-line could make them, and surround the same with box-trees, elaborately cut in travesty of the human form? Were all the priests who mumbled Latin and counted beads—thus worshipping, as one might say, through the medium of the classics and mathematics—spiritually deaf and blind, that they knew nothing of the truths which nature speaks direct from God himself? Or if they did know, how was it that they never told their people? Perhaps they had

their reasons for silence upon this matter; perhaps there was an unauthorised sect, calling themselves Lovers of Nature,* whom it was expedient to put down, and a censorship of the press, which excised everything written about her, as William Cobbett would have eliminated from poetry all adjectives. But even the monks (who have been made answerable for so much, poor men, although they were useful too in their time) cannot be held responsible for this fact, that when our forefathers—a good many times removed—set their hands to build, their notion of what we call “aspect” was peculiar; and if, in spite of them, their ground-floor

* Not by any means to be compared with those persons now termed “Naturalists,” who, it has been said, would peep and botanise upon their mother’s grave.

sitting-rooms did happen to command a view, they generally saw their error, and hastened to repair it, by raising a great wall immediately in front.

All allowance made for their pardonable solicitude to make our dwelling-houses defensible, when every man's hand (with a cross-bow in it) was against his brother, our architects of old, whether British, Danish, or Norman, were, it must be admitted, *Goths*. If they did build a house upon a hill, it was not for the prospect, but in order the better to annoy people who might want to approach it; and when you find a peep-hole in a Norman tower, designed, as you might think, to afford a bird's-eye view of Paradise, you may be disabused of that idea by remarking a little furrow down the centre of the outlet, for the convenience of pouring

melted pitch upon visitors. Clyffe Hall was no exception to other old houses in preparations for this sort of welcome, as likewise in its independence of all outward attractions. The ground-floor was shrouded in gloom. Either the windows were recesses, broad within, but narrowing in the thickness of the wall to the merest slits, or they were hidden by the terrace parapet. Moreover, where the panes were moderately large, many of them were of stained glass, and blushed with the blood of knights and dames of the House of Clyffard. The library, in particular, which should have been the best-lighted room of all, was the worst. It was beneath the level of the terrace, and entered from within by a descent; the sun even at noonday only made a sort of splendid gloom there.

Its beams had to struggle through the painted shields of Sir John and Sir Gwinnet, of Sir Bevis and Sir Mark, before they passed the window. This apartment had once been the armoury, and still bore traces of the use to which it had been put, before the mighty tomes, standing shoulder to shoulder, as though resolved not to be taken down alone and read, garrisoned the room. Above the shelves glanced many a fair device, deserving to be better seen, of mace and spear, of axe and harquebuse; and upon the oaken panels between the shelves shone whole sheaves of ancient weapons, the gleanings of many a harvest-field of war.

Upon the morning of the interview between Mildred Leigh and her aunt, this apartment was occupied, as it usually was at that period of the day, by Rupert and

Raymond Clyffard. They were sitting within the same oriel-window, and close to the casement, in order to get as much light as possible for the occupations in which they were engaged. The elder was poring over an old ill-printed volume of romances, the younger was engaged in making a fish-hook attractive for trout.

"I wish you wouldn't whistle so, Ray," observed the former testily; "how is one to read?"

"I didn't know you *were* reading, Rue; you seemed to me to be only thinking."

"*Only* thinking," sighed Rupert; "but that is much harder work than reading."

"Is it?" replied the other carelessly. "I never do either, and therefore am no judge. What are the important matters which demand your attention so urgently this morn-

ing, that my whistling *Charlie is my Darling* would interrupt them? I was doing it solely out of compliment to your Jacobite tendencies."

The other did not reply, but sat with downcast eyes fixed on the floor, on which the rich heraldic blazons were thrown, tracing idly with his foot the fantastic course of bend and ribbon, lozenge and fret. After a little he broke silence with, "I wish I was you, Raymond!"

"That is an odd wish," returned the other, laughing. "Do you who know so much, then, desire to be ignorant? Or being the heir of Clyffe, would you exchange it for a younger brother's portion?"

"There are worse things than being poor," returned the young man gravely; "but it was not of mere station I was

thinking. I envy you your happy disposition, your never-flagging spirits, and those pleasures which the simplest sports never fail to afford. I envy you your very strength of limb, Raymond, and the manly beauty of your face."

"Really, Rue, you make me blush," replied the other laughing. "I am not accustomed to such pretty speeches from the ladies, I assure you. Mrs. Clyffard was so good as to tell me in confidence, only yesterday, that I was a black devil. I wonder whether there is such a thing as a white she-fiend."

"Hush, Ray, hush; the walls of Clyffe have ears."

"Their talent for hearing, Rue, is, however, a very modern accomplishment; just two years old, as I reckon, this day. You

may shake your head, brother, but until our good father brought that woman hither, what things we spoke reached only the ears for which they were intended."

"She is our father's wife, Ray, and—and"—Rupert stopped and stammered.

" 'And we should respect her for his sake,' you were about to add," observed Raymond coolly. "Upon the contrary, I protest it is mainly upon his account that I hold her so vile. He is a changed man since he married her; he loves not us, his boys, as he used to do; and as for poor me, it is well if he does not end by hating me. Do you remember telling me that ancient story of the Greek creature, half woman, half serpent, fair without, but foul within, with whom men fell enamoured, and so perished? There must be some glamour about this woman,

or our father could never be so enmeshed."

"I have read, Raymond, that men when old are more liable to the enchantments of love than even in youth."

"I can scarcely believe that, Rupert," exclaimed the younger gravely, after a little pause.

"And scarcely can *I*, brother, yet a wise man has written it, who had himself been young. It is certain that Mrs. Clyffard is gentle and comely; and there lies magic enough in that without sorcery."

"Comely!" echoed Raymond with abhorrence. "I could as easily admire the comeliness of a viper. Gentle! ay, the stealthy gentleness of a tigress, as she creeps upon her unconscious victim. You smile incredulously, Rue; you have only seen her velvet foot; but I have seen its claws."

"She has, I do think, been cruel to you, Raymond."

"Nay, brother, say rather she has been herself to me; to my father, and to you she has never revealed her true character. How strange it is, Rue, with all your brains and book-learning, that you cannot read a wicked woman! You see how our father's melancholy deepens daily—how his mind withdraws itself more and more from all wholesome matters, to brood over the sad fortunes of our house; and yet you cannot see who casts the shadow, and ever thrusts herself between him and the fostering sun."

"It needs no woman to make a Clyffard sad," returned Rupert gloomily; "to blacken the annals of our race would indeed be a superfluous task. There is scarcely a chain-

ber in this house which is not eloquent of our crimes or shame; and if we go out of doors, there is no tongue but wags to the same tune."

"They wag not so to me, brother; never, at least, since I pitched Gawain Harrison into Nettle Hole for prating to me about Guy Clyffard. It is understood now, when I go a-fishing, that I want a man to carry my basket, not to tell foolish stories against my ancestors. Why, half a century hence, that righteous chastisement of Gawain at my hands will have swollen into an attempt to murder a vassal. Does Heaven set its face against us, think you, more than against other folk, or is it not rather that we have rejected its alliance? You might just as well complain that we do not sit here in the pure sunlight, when we have shut

it out ourselves with yon painted pride. I swear that I would rather be that peasant-boy, keeping sheep upon Ribble Fell side, than be cursed with ancestors whose memory so dispirited me. If Guy Clyffard did leap into Boden Pot, what then? Are you and I, and all his descendants, obliged to jump after him? Come, sweep these cobwebs from your mind, Rue, or one day they will do you a mischief."

"What mean you by that, sir?" cried Rupert, starting to his feet, his blue eyes gleaming with rage. "How dare you say such things? You call others cruel, but none have ventured to wound me thus far."

"My dear Rue," returned the other with astonishment, and a pity that he strove in vain to conceal, "what have I said to anger you? I declare, upon my honour, that I

meant nothing more than that such morbid thoughts were bad for anybody. Have we not even now the saddest proof of it in our poor"——

"Be silent; do not mention him," interrupted Rupert menacingly. "I tell you, I will not hear his name."

"What! not my father's," returned Raymond. "I was merely about to repeat that his melancholy arises mainly from encouraging such fancies."

"Perhaps," answered Rupert, with an effort at self-control—"perhaps it does. I misunderstood you, Raymond; I did not mean"——

"I am sure you meant me no harm," replied the other, laying his hand kindly on Rupert's shoulder. "Come now with me a-fishing in Ribble Beck."

"I will join you there, Ray, presently; but I have something else to do first, I have indeed. I would rather be alone for a little." Rupert said this, walking hastily towards the door, as though afraid lest his brother's importunity should overcome his own resolution.

Raymond's eyes followed him with genuine sympathy until the door had closed behind him.

"Poor Rue! poor Rue!" he murmured. "God grant that thou mayst not bring the Curse down on thine own head! It is no wonder that such prophecies work out their own fulfilment, when they have minds like thine to deal with. I wish with thee that thou and I could but change places. Rubbish of that sort might be shot *here*, I fancy," striking his broad chest a sounding

blow, "without much damage. I am none of your dreamy ones, thank God! It is eleven o'clock. There are one, two, three good hours of fishing before me; and then, ah! then, for my sweet Mildred!"

The dark face lightened as he spoke, and the eyes, somewhat too stern for boyhood, softened like the black waters of a mountain tarn touched by the moon, as he strode gaily from the sunken chamber, and through the vaulted passages to the hall, whistling his merry tune. So blithe he shone amid the general gloom, it seemed as though the haunting shadows of the place fled at his sprightly step, and gathered together after him more darkly than before, like clouds behind the sun.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MASTER OF CLYFFE.

RALPH CLYFFARD was no bookworm like his elder son, and yet no sportsman like his younger. Now, for a man of fortune to live in the country and be happy, it is almost essential that he should be one of these two things. Even now-a-days, when he has the fortnightly, or even weekly, dispensation of justice at the next town to attend, and the Board of Guardians offers its uneasy chair at the like intervals, time hangs heavy with that country gentleman whose library mainly consists of works of the era

of the *Turkish Spy*, and who cannot take sweet counsel with his keeper concerning "the birds." Still the *Times* comes every morning, save on that unhappy Monday, and there are mitigations in short swallow-flights to town by help of the steam-horse, whose hot white breath can be seen, let us hope, from our Castle of Indolence, rising serpentine along the distant valley, like incense from the Altar of Travel. But it is only lately that such has been the case. If a grandfather of ours, being a country Squire, did not hunt, it awoke commiseration or contempt, according as he was popular or the reverse among his neighbours. If he took to reading, it was a portent, a course of proceeding so altogether abnormal and uncanny, that it was not much spoken about; but if he was neither sportsman nor scholar,


people set him down as Mad. Ralph Clyffard was not mad, but he was possessed with a devil—the fiend of family pride; not a reasonable sort of disease with any folks, but in his case unaccountable in the highest degree; for there never had been a Clyffard, from Bryan the Founder—a freebooter—to Cyril, the shell of whose rayless mind had not been yet put underground, of whom their descendants had any cause to *be* proud; on the contrary, that generation was an exceptional one the record of which was unstained by gross vices. What a gracious power is that of Time, which can make Dulness shine from afar with starlike mellowness, ay, and hallow Crime itself? How strange it is that the Tyrant of a few ages ago should look to us the Hero, and the wild Rake win our readiest charity, if not

extort our admiration, while the Bully and the Sot of to-day are held at their just value. If the Future is seen darkly, or rather dimly, it is not at least distorted like this Past; there is no weird charm about it, that can make evil seem good, and baseness beauty. I have known even godly men to be greatly befooled in this matter, taking their Jack o' Lanterns, arising from the phosphorescent bodies of their dead ancestors, for quite a celestial lustre; the few centuries over which their forefathers have straddled more or less ignobly, dividing their thoughts with that eternity which they hope to pass with the saints of the earth.*

* "Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names."


This is surely something worse than unreasonable. A good and wise father is an inestimable blessing, and if *his* father has been good and wise before him, and *his* father before *him*, it is a subject of satisfaction indeed to a great-grand-son, and the more so, inasmuch as such continuity of excellence is rather rare; but the mere fact of being able to trace the *existence* of one's forefathers—unless by their good deeds—even to infinite series, is surely no genuine ground for self-congratulation; the sole credit is due to the Herald's College, or to the man whom you have ventured to censure, perhaps, for having somewhat prolonged his task in the muniment-room (at a guinea a day, and free quarters in your ancestral mansion) of making out the family-tree. That red-nosed scribe himself is indubitably

descended from the same ancestor—one Adam—as you are; and the sole difference between you two in this respect is, that *you* have the money and the inclination to spend it upon making clear those last few steps which intervene between yourself and William the Norman at furthest. The rest of the ladder is hidden, like Jacob's, in impenetrable cloud. Nor am I to be told that this is all vulgar talk; that a certain divinity doth hedge about this wonder of Long Descent made plain, more than can be explained away by mortal scribbler; for if, at any round of the said ladder, some ancestor of any man of lineage has chanced to leave his purse behind him, we call his descendant Yeoman, or worse, look you, and attach no sort of divinity to him at all. Thus there are farms in Devon, as doubtless



all over this historic land of ours, which have been held by the same race in an unbroken line for twenty generations; whose blood is as pure as the Howards'. These are much "respected" as long as they pay their rent; but it is reserved for their landlord—the lord of the manor, who dates perhaps at earliest from some rogue whom Bluff Harry loved (for his wife's sake), and to whom he gave lands filched from their common mother, the Church—to boast himself in scutcheons and chevrons, in "jack-asses fighting for gilt gingerbread," as a gentleman of ancient lineage. One must own some timber beside one's family-tree to get *that* held in this sort of Druidical reverence.

The Clyffards had plenty of timber, and all things fitting beside; that jewel of fancy



price, their ancestry, was splendidly set, and had a gorgeous casket. It had never, in the most perilous times, been stripped of its surroundings, or even forced for a season to conceal its far-darting lustre. The sort of chivalry that had animated Norman Bryan had been transmitted through all his line; "the good old rule, the simple plan, that they should take who have the power, and they should keep who can," had been preserved in its integrity. The Clyffards had had no need to marry heiresses; their shields bore no escutcheons of pretence; their prosperity had grown like a river, but, unlike it, had needed no foreign feeders to sustain it. There had been dry seasons, when it had fallen a little, and there had been times of civil commotion, when it had even been dammed up; but the obstacle

removed, the broad stream of prosperity had only poured forth in the greater volume. They had cared nothing for Roses, Red or White; but each had smelled the sweeter in the nostrils of wise Sir Mark, as it had prevailed over the other. They had loved King Charles and monarchy, but not with such a perfect love that it had cast out the fear of Cromwell and his Ironsides. Sir John, indeed, had made a wrong cast in that matter, and defended Clyffe against Lambert. The blood of Cavalier and of Roundhead had not refused to mix in the castle-moat, for four long weeks of siege. The west wing had sorely suffered. You might see even now the scars upon the stubborn stone. Many a shock of battle had that front withstood, and often hearkened to the roar of

culverin and ring of steel, which now regarded the trim garden only, and the sleeping waters, and listened to the mowing of the scythe and the leap of fish. It had done with war for ever; and swallow-haunted, ivy-clad, it looked like one who, having had his days of trouble, henceforth spends a life of leisure among friends. Even the trouble had been short-lived. Without storming and without surrender, the banner of the Parliament had been quietly substituted for that of the king upon the round tower of Clyffe Hall, and General Lambert had dined with Sir John at the same table, in the banqueting-room, under which the royal legs of the Stuart had condescended to place themselves only a few months before.

It was of such ancestors as these that Ralph Clyffard was proud; and of far worse

than these. He was by no means a bad man himself; there was not one of his long line, perhaps, who, being compared with him, would not, upon the whole, have suffered by the contrast. There was really a sort of sublimity in his ignorance of the true state of the case—in his personal humility and in his outrageous family pride. “I am nothing in myself,” he might have exclaimed, “but everything in virtue of my descent from an unbroken line of almost unmitigated scoundrels.” He hoped, when his time came, as it must come to all (and Death wore its chief awe in his eyes, inas-much as it had not spared those great ones whose proud faces frowned even upon *him*, from their canvas in the Oak Gallery)—he hoped, I say, to meet his end at last like a Clyffard and a Christian, without being

at all aware that that devout desire involved a contradiction in terms. And yet he was not without an impression that his forefather, Guy, had not behaved altogether as became a person of his condition. Many took it for granted, and with reason, that Ralph Clyffard suffered no steel to shear his locks, and drank nothing stronger than water from the spring, in hopes to save that wicked ancestor at least some years of purging fires; for the old faith which had served the Clyffards for so long was his, robbed of none of its pretensions save in one vital particular. Never since excommunicated Guy's time had priests been harboured in Clyffe Hall. They had had the run of the place at one period, which had indeed, at certain troublous epochs, been, as it were, burrowed out for their convenience.

There was a priest's chamber between the ceiling and the roof of at least one sleeping-room of state. The Clyffards had been not unwilling to run certain risks for the Church's sake, provided that the penalty was not extreme; they made such a bid for heaven as they considered reasonable, but not to the peril of house and lands. They affected religion much as a sort of Anti-purgatory Insurance Society; but they were not prepared to pay any exorbitant premium. Some of them even thought it possible that there might not be a purgatory after all. The relation between the House of Clyffard and the Church of Rome being of this ticklish description, it surely behoved the latter power to be as winsome and indulgent in all cases of peccadillo as might be consistent with

the security of the latter's souls; yet in the above-mentioned case of Guy's favourite bloodhound, which had suffered capital punishment by the king's order ("martyred," said its master) for child-eating, great complications arose. The priest most unexpectedly took the mawkish view of the matter. "Another word, and I bury my dog in the chapel!" quoth irascible Guy.

"At your peril!" exclaimed he of the shaven crown, with a worse shudder than he had experienced upon the occasion of the original offence. "Beware the thunders of the Church."

"Anathema Maranatha to your heart's content—big words break no bones," replied the stout Squire contemptuously; and he buried the dog where he had threatened, with all the funeral honours that laymen

could pay. The priest left Clyffe, shaking the dust from his shoes; and at the very earliest date at which the fulminating material could be manufactured, Guy Clyffard was excommunicated.


They cursed him in eating, they cursed him in drinking ;
They cursed him in coughing, in sneezing, in winking.

Never was heard such a terrible curse.

But what gave rise
To no little surprise,
Nobody seemed one penny the worse.

Not a jackdaw in the western tower moulted
a feather.

When the immediate irritation had subsided, both parties repented having resorted to such extreme measures. Guy Clyffard did penance—having permission to boil his pease very soft indeed—and the Church of Rome took him once more under her protection. But there was henceforth this




difference, that her ministers never came to Clyffe Hall unless they were sent for, and sometimes, it was whispered, not even then. Poor Guy perished without any to shrive him; no priest was among those witnesses whom his widow had summoned upon her side to prove that he had died, if not in the odour of sanctity, at least in his bed, and not in Boden Pot. In expectation, doubtless, that he would be paid some scurvy trick of the kind, the deceased had left behind him the most stringent directions to the Clyffards who should come after him, that, in case he should fail to receive his last sacramental rites, no lodgment should henceforward be given in Clyffe Hall to tricky priests. The document which conveyed this posthumous mandate was a wonder in its way, being full of those identical "big words"

—mere threatenings and thunders—which he had himself set at naught in the mouth of one much more privileged—if custom is privilege—to utter them; yet, strange to say, they were obeyed. One or two of his descendants may have been swayed by the convenience of the command. It was more agreeable for many reasons that the keeper of the Clyffard conscience, instead of being on the spot to watch its workings too minutely, should step over from the hamlet hard by, and perform the duties of his office when required; but Ralph Clyffard obeyed the injunction for its own sake. The ill-written, ill-spelled parchment, dictated by malice, and enjoining but a mean sort of revenge, was in his eyes a sacred writing. He kept it in a vast iron-bound chest, furnished with double locks, and containing

a number of other family documents, from the original deed of gift—conferring the manor of Clyffe *in capite* of our lord the king, by the sergeanty of finding him a sheaf of arrows and six loaves of oat-bread whenever he should hunt in Ribble Forest—down to poor Cyril's mad will, not worth the parchment it was written on.

Looking upon Ralph Clyffard's haggard but not ill-favoured face, and the plaited hair that fringed it, one could not but wonder what he could have been in his youth. Could he ever have been a trustful child, saying his prayers at a mother's knee? A light-hearted boy, enjoying the sports of the hour with all a boy's capacity for enjoyment? A young man courting the smiles of beauty, his pulses throbbing with the fulness of the Spring, had he ever ex-

perienced those palmy days which, long or short, fall to the lot of almost all mortals? Most of us have met such men, and tried to picture them in the cradle, in the playground, or at the altar with their brides—and failed. Their past is not to be imagined; and even those who witnessed it can tell us little. Of Ralph Clyffard, men knew only that he had been a dutiful son under circumstances when it was not easy to be dutiful; that a kind heart lay somewhere within him, notwithstanding his haughty and austere behaviour; and that in his first marriage he had pleased his father, and in his second pleased himself. He had been brought up at Clyffe from his infancy, but not, of course, as its heir. He had never desired to be so; and had driven the very thought of it away from



him as far as possible. Not only did his childless uncle Roderick look likely to live for a score of years to come, but his own father Arthur, the younger brother, was alive, a stout man too; and what was still more to the purpose, there was Cyril, a hale boy, but a twelvemonth older than himself. Yet even then Ralph was fully persuaded that he should be master of Clyffe, for that the Curse of the Clyffards must needs fall.

CHAPTER VII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

“**H**AS Cyril’s death made you so very sad, Ralph, that not even *I* can comfort you?” asked Mrs. Clyffard of her husband, as he sat in a small chamber communicating with his dressing-room, and in which he was accustomed to transact his business affairs. He smiled, not sadly, but gratefully, lovingly, in her false face, yet gravely shook his head.

“You always comfort me, dear one. If I were dejected on my own account only, you would soon cheer me. But it is not

so, Grace, although many would be sad who knew their doom had been spoken, who felt as I feel"—he laid his hand upon his heart—"that I have had my warning, and must soon go; yet I do not repine for that matter."

"I will not combat your opinion, love," answered she, "fallacious and ill-grounded though I believe it to be: with me, whatever you think is sacred."

"Sweet Grace, how I love you!" returned the old man. "It is only for your sake that I regret to go. I have reigned here my allotted time; how gladly would I leave all to my successor, Heaven knows, if I might only think he would hold it. Poor Rue! poor Rue!"

Ralph Clyffard bent his head, and hid his face. His wife's arm still encircled his neck; her voice was low and soft, and

seemed to tremble with love and pity; but her eyes looked down upon him with contemptuous scorn.

“And what is to prevent Rupert from holding his own, husband? Nothing, save a dark legend of your house—a morbid fantasy of your own—a”——

“Did you never read my uncle Roderick’s will, Grace?” interrupted Ralph.

“His *will*?” cried Mrs. Clyffard, involuntarily withdrawing her caressing hand. “I never even heard that he had made a will. I did not know that he *could* have made a will. Is not the land entailed? Father to son, uncle to nephew; has it not ever been so with your ancient race?”

“It has ever been so,” returned her husband gloomily. “Father to son, but never to son’s son, since Guy’s time.”

"Ay, ay," exclaimed Mrs. Clyffard impatiently; but masking her apprehensions with a great effort, she added, in a soothing tone: "Let us not talk of that, Ralph; let us not think of it, if possible." Then, with affected carelessness, she added, "Is yonder dusty parchment at your elbow this said will?"

She reached her hand towards it, but he was beforehand with her, and gently, but firmly, he retained his hold upon it. "Nay, do not open it, Grace, for mere curiosity's sake."

If he could but have seen her face in its rapacious earnestness—the intense longing of her greedy eyes; if he could but have known what it cost her to restrain the nervous twitching of those taper fingers, he could scarcely have talked of Curiosity—it was Cupidity aghast with Fear.

"I will tell you all that Roderick would have me tell, wife, if he were alive. I hide nothing from you—nothing."

"Nothing, Ralph," returned she tenderly, her mind straining after the precious parchment like a greyhound in the leash. "If I thought you kept a secret from me, it would kill me."

"Would it so, dear one? Then, since I would have you live, you shall hear my uncle Roderick's will. He herein leaves Clyffe to Arthur his son, and to Cyril after him, for thirty years, and then"—

"But he *could* not leave it, Ralph. How mean you, then, he left it?"

"He thought he could. He was mad—the second son, and yet mad; think of that, Grace! No lawyer has ever seen this writing; it would count as nothing in his

eyes; he would smile at the dead Clyffard's ravings, and I do not choose that any man should do that. For thirty years willed he Clyffe to my father and my brother, after which he shall return—so it runs—and resume his own again. I have seen his coffin in the chapel vault closed with a mighty lock like yonder chest—save that it opens from within as well—and a key is buried with him, that he may arise, and let himself out when the time comes. The thirty years will very soon be ended.”

“I trust, Ralph, that you do not believe”——

“Fear not, Grace,” interrupted her husband quietly; “I keep my own wits still, although they are sorely tried. I almost wish it was not so, and that I could deem dead

Roderick might come to life again. It is worse to think that he was mad, having no right to be so; and rather than men should know of this sad will, I would lose many a fair acre of those which it so strangely devises. It was the mere reading of it which set me sorrowing. How goes it with Rupert, think you, Grace?"

"He looks bravely, husband. He will fitly wear your honours after you, though not, I trust, for long, long years to come."

"He has heard the news, I suppose?"

"I told him myself, Ralph, lest some vulgar tongue should wound him with the rough delivery of it; and I charged the household not to speak of it within his hearing."

"You should have charged them not to speak of it at all," returned her husband

sternly. "Great Heaven, are the misfortunes of our house to be the talk of grooms!"

"We cannot chain the tongue, Ralph; and since the law forbids to cut it out, as your high-handed race were wont to do when a menial's speech displeased them, the most we can do is to direct its course."

"As wise as fair!" repeated Ralph in a low tone. "You have done right, Grace, as you always do."

"Nay, husband, I have only done my best. Little, indeed, is the best I can do, in return for what I have received at your hands. I was low, and you lifted me up; I was base, and you set me in honour." A shadow flitted over her husband's brow. "Not," she continued, "that I ever think of these things now, save when I am alone

with you, as now. I have left the Past behind me altogether. Connected with your race, although by marriage only, I feel myself well-born."

"That is rightly said, Grace. The Clyffards, like the king, confer nobility itself. Never speak, then, of what was once your lowly lot, even to me. You are mistress of Clyffe; you will be so after I am gone—that is, until"—Ralph Clyffard paused and sighed, the wave of thought overtaken by another ere it could break in speech. "And what did Rupert say when you told him of poor Cyril?"

"He said he was grieved to hear it, but scarcely surprised. He hoped Uncle Cyril would be buried at the Hall, and not at the Dene." Ralph shuddered. "Then he seemed lost in thought, and answered me

at random; but presently, upon some trifling interruption—it was the organ in the gallery, played by Mildred Leigh, I think—he brightened up at once. Music is good for him, and the companionship of the young. It is but a dull life he leads here, and fit to make a young man sad.”

“Raymond is not sad,” returned her husband, like one who, to gain time, urges something which he knows has but little force.

“That is true,” answered Mrs. Clyffard coldly. “To chase the stag, the fox, the otter, is happiness enough for Raymond. He might have been a huntsman born, for any instinct of gentle birth that he possesses. Nay, even a huntsman would have some reverence for the race which he served, whereas Raymond——”

"Well, wife, what of Raymond?"

"Nothing, Ralph—nothing. You are grave enough already, without my saddening you further. And, after all, perhaps he only does it to vex *me*. He does not love his step-mother; that is only natural. A man's sons, unless they are dutiful, like Rupert, too often resent their father's second marriage."

"Resent it!" cried Ralph Clyffard, starting up and smiting the table with his fist—"resent it! What! is he his father's tutor? Am I to be told my duty by this rude boy? Have I robbed him of gold or lands, that he should be envious of me? Does he grudge an old man that which renders the last few years of his life less lonely, less drear? Even had we children, he would have his mother's portion; they would not

rob him of a silver piece. Nay, I have left him thrice as much besides. Unnatural, undutiful, base!"

"Hush, Ralph—hush. Be calm. Do nothing in anger. Let poor me, at least, be not the means of sowing dissension between father and son; for he is your son, you know, after all. What I was about to say was only this, that knowing how dear to me is the honour of your house, and with what worship I look upon the Clyffards, alien though I be, he scoffs and sneers at what should be held most reverend, at least, by one of their own blood; nay, he says 'blood' is nothing. 'Why not Bone—a gentleman of Bone? If old Blood is so precious, why, then, are old Bones so cheap?' But I fear I vex you, husband."

Ralph Clyffard's eyes were flashing fire.

One hand clung to the table, grasping it like a vice; the other was pressed against his heart. His white lips moved as with a spasm twice and thrice before they could shape "Go on."

"There is little more to say, Ralph; I have said already more than I intended. You must please hold this a secret; you must understand it is to me alone he thus speaks out. He flings his gibes about to all, 'tis true, making a mock of ancestry; but he keeps his worst for me, because, as I have said, he knows the barb goes home. His aim at me is surest when he strikes through you and yours. For instance——"

"Ay, for instance," gasped Ralph Clyffard; "give me that."

"He says 'the fair woman,' for whose sake Bertram killed his brother, and whom you yourself"——

Ralph uttered a cry of horror. "I see her now!" cried he. "Some death is coming, or the Curse is falling! Look—look; *there—there!*"

"Dear husband, you are pointing to the mirror; you behold only the reflection of myself." She spoke as lightly as she could, but her voice trembled with genuine terror. "Dear Ralph, 'tis I. Do you not know your Grace?"

He shrank from her caress with almost loathing. "Touch me not!" cried he, repelling her with one hand, while he shaded his eyes with the other. "I cannot bear it; so like—so like! Was it indeed the mirror?"

"Look for yourself," said she, "and at the original." She smiled her sunniest smile, and, with her head aslant, shook her fair

locks about her in a shower of gold. As different looked she from that rigid form which, with menacing finger, had just glassed itself before Ralph Clyffard's gaze, as Hebe from Atropos."

"Fair Grace!" cried he enraptured, "how beautiful you are! it makes me young to look at you! How could I ever mistake you for another, far less for that dread spectre—harbinger of ill! Thrice have I seen it. Was it not thrice, Grace? I can think now of nothing but of thee."

"You told me thrice, Ralph, and that it boded Death, or worse; and on the fifth day these messengers arrive telling of Cyril's end. This must be more than chance."

"Ay, more than chance indeed."

"Yet Raymond says there is no 'fair woman' at Clyffe save me—a cruel saying, when we think of what she was."

"Does he dare to say that much?" exclaimed Ralph hoarsely. "Does he think I am befooled, then?"

"Nay, he knows nothing of what you have seen. How should he, husband, save through me alone?"

"True—true; but he makes light of the legends of our house."

"Makes more than light, sir; makes merry with them, as with a churchyard tale told by a sexton to keep boys from leap-frog on the tombs; has no more reverent word for any of them than Hobgoblin, Bogle; and no more courteous term than Dupe and Fool for those who have cause to know better." She waited, looking

for a storm of wrath, but this time it did not come. Ralph's mind had been working in a direction which, with all her skill, she could not follow. Like some out-man-œuvred general, who suddenly finds his beleaguered foe at large, having emerged behind him underground by sap, so she stared, foiled, in her husband's quiet face, and listened to his measured tones.

"This may be, as you say, Grace; nay, if *you* say so, it is—and yet I must not be hasty. He was my late wife's favourite son."

"Parents should have no favourites, Ralph. If *she* spoiled him, that is no reason why you should complete his ruin."

"You say well, Grace; parents should have no favourites: there is no selfishness which works such ill as undue partiality

in father or mother towards any of their offspring."

"Where it *is* undue," slid in the woman.

"And if, in spite of duty, such a feeling creeps into a father's heart, not only should he not exhibit it, but should strive by all means to make up to the less beloved child for the injury he has involuntarily done him. At times, I fear, upon the contrary, I have been harsh to Raymond, vexed with him, because I am vexed with my own heart on his account. His nature is so different from mine—from that of all our race."

"Ay, it is indeed."

"And yet, if he is rough in manner, he has a feeling heart."

"He went a-fishing this morning, though his uncle Cyril died but two days back,"

remarked Mrs. Clyffard. "I saw him by the beck's side myself. A feeling heart, forsooth! Nay, even if he has, what matter? Why should that poor excuse be taken for grave dereliction of duty, for vice, for disrespect?"

"What would you have me do with Raymond, Grace?" asked her husband thoughtfully.

"I, Ralph? Nay, it is no concern of mine. If it is your good pleasure to pass over faults that are patent to the world, by all means do so; but seeing your solicitude upon poor Rupert's account, I"—

"Well, Grace?"

"I wonder at your blindness—that is all. Setting aside the ill effect that Raymond's example might have upon his brother—for he has the stronger will, although he is

the younger—it is strange to me you do not mark his assumption, his arrogance. Not only does he shew respect for none, but lords it as though he knew he were the heir of all.”

“Ah, does he so?” cried Ralph.

“He does, as though his brother were already doomed. This very morning, in the library, he dared to twit him with his morbid feelings, his tainted mind, and angered him with hints at what might happen.”

“Are you *sure*, wife?” inquired Ralph Clyffard, greatly moved. “How know you this? Beware how you advance this thing, if you have no certain knowledge.”

“I am no tale-bearer,” returned Mrs. Clyffard haughtily. “I know of myself that so it was. Believe me it would be best that these boys were kept apart.”

“But Rupert would be more dull than ever, Grace.”

“Then give him meet and gay companions; set the old Hall doors wide, and bid your neighbours’ sons be friends with the heir of Clyffe.”

“I cannot do it, Grace; you know I cannot do it; and if I could, there is no neighbour’s son that is his equal. They would be flatterers all.”

“Then listen, Ralph; I speak this, once for all: the Curse will fall, and it is you who will have called it down. Some companionship Rue must have, or he will mope—some one that will cheer, and yet will sympathise with him—some one with the same tastes, but with a healthier spirit; one he can love, and who will return his love, and above all, one who will render Clyffe—

which is now hateful to him—familiar and beloved, as you have made its frowning walls to me, Ralph; and all beneath the eye of you his father, who thus need never lose sight of your beloved son, but will be gladdened day by day to see this blessing work.”

“And in whom is such a paragon—such a flower of friendship—to be found?” asked Ralph Clyffard gloomily.

“Where you have found some comfort, or have told me so, dear husband—in a wife.”

Ralph stared in silence, then—she silent too—observed, “But Rue is a mere boy, a child.”

“Then let him wait—if you think there is no danger in his waiting. In the meantime, let him engage himself, let the girl

reside here—here with me—and her good influence begin at once.”

“But how can this be done, Grace? Who would consent to do it? Would it not arouse suspicion, too—the misfortune of our house being known to all—of the very thing we fear? What girl of fitting birth and station would thus be wooed, or rather would thus woo? You would not have my Rupert demean”—

Ralph stopped and stammered.

“You are thinking of *me*, husband. I am not thinking of myself, but of you and yours. I answer what you are going to say with your own words, ‘The Clyffards, like the king, confer nobility itself.’ However, let us talk no more of this at present; only think upon it, there may be no occasion for the remedies you seem to think

so desperate. There is no hurry for a month or so."

"A month!" cried Ralph with agitation.

"Well, say, then, for two months. But remember this: once let the mischief go too far, and although your race were twice as ancient as it is, and your rent-roll ten times as long, no woman, gentle or simple, pure or frail, would consent to link her fate with that of Rupert Clyffard."

"I will think of it," groaned the master of Clyffe. "Leave me now, Grace; I cannot bear even your sweet company."

She stooped, touching with her lips his stern, unconscious brow, and left the chamber without a word; but on the other side of the closed door she paused, and whispered to her own triumphant face, reflected in

the dark and polished oak, "The doting fool is mine; for I have sown the seed of much, and it will grow!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CLEMENT CARR DINES WITH THE FAMILY.

IT has been well said, with respect to early rising, that the morning song and the evening song of most persons are very different; promises of being up with the lark, of seeing the sun rise, of having a bathe in the river before breakfast, being often given overnight with an enthusiasm in strange contrast with the loathing with which they are fulfilled. We draw the bill with the utmost readiness, since the hour of payment seems so far away; but in the dark dawn of acceptance and liquidation,

how we curse our former facility for autograph-writing! Similar, although in inverse proportion, are the alternations of the human mind before and after food. No man, save a *fire-eater*, can fight well fasting; whereas, after a plentiful repast, if a man is afraid of anything, it were rank flattery to call him coward.

Thus, Mr. Clement Carr, whose conduct on his arrival at Clyffe Hall before breakfast we have seen to have been almost pusillanimous, was, after breakfast, in a condition to bid defiance to the powers of at least the Supernatural. He had consumed the half of a large game-pie, besides such kickshaws as trout and marmalade; while, in place of tea, he had imbibed the whole of a flagon of old ale, as well as that glass of brandy "to top up with,"

which is termed by would-be dyspeptic persons "a constable:" and he wanted to know *what* the devil was meant by putting him in the housekeeper's room, and *why* the devil he had not been asked to breakfast with the family, and *how* the devil it all was. In vain did Mr. William Cator endeavour to persuade him that no personal slight had been intentionally put upon him; that it was not the custom in great houses, or, at all events, at Clyffe, for the gentlefolk to take their morning meal together, and that the Master of Clyffe himself broke his fast alone, and even dined alone.

"I shall dine in his dining-room, however," interrupted Mr. Clement with resolution. "I am not going to be fobbed off with accommodation of this sort *twice*; not

going to be set down at the same table again with a serving-man like you. Fire and furies! am I not own brother to the mistress of the house, and uncle to wash-her-name, the other young woman? *O cosh*, I dine with the family!"

"When Mr. Gideon is here, he does not do so," returned Cator quietly.

"Well, and what then? Hoosh Gideon? I suppose I can do as I think proper? Ain't I a"— Here Mr. Clement Carr had to contend with those sworn foes of all eloquence, and especially of the eloquence of indignation, called the hiccups. "Ain't I a— Trout and marmalade always give them me; it's most astronery; nothing but brandy stops them. Wash was I going to say? Ain't I a gentleman bred? Whash the dush do you mean by my sleeping at the

village inn? Don't interrupt, sir. *O cosh*, there's no village inn. I shall shleep in the besh room in this housh."

"That's the Blue Room, where the ghost is, Mr. Clement."

"Who kairsh for the ghost? I shall shleep in the besh room, whether it's blue, or green, or yellow, or whatever coloursh it is."

"Well, I daresay Miss Grace herself, as was, will be here presently," observed Mr. William Cator; "you had better tackle *her* about it; it's no use bragging to me."

Accordingly, when the mistress of Clyffe did pay the housekeeper's room a visit, not, however, until the morning had so far advanced that Mr. Clement Carr had seen fit to refresh himself with a second meal, and had thereby kept up his courage, he

at once "tackled" that lady upon the lack of personal respect that had been paid to him, Clement Carr, Esquire.

"I am sure I am very sorry, brother," returned she gravely: "you have had enough, however, I trust, to eat. I need not ask as to your drinking."

"What can one do *but* drinksh," inquired her relative in a tone half apologetic, half defiant; "shut up with a serving-man without any conversationsh?"

"What does he want, Cator?" inquired Mrs. Clyffard contemptuously.

"He wants to dine in the dining-room, and sleep in the Blue Chamber, ma'am."

"Besh room in the housh," muttered Mr. Clement.

"You are very easily satisfied, brother; and so it shall be; only, before you dine,

you must get sober. The young gentlemen of this family do not drink to excess, and what is more, there will be a young lady at table."

"Only Mildred Leigh, I supposh."

"*Only* Mildred Leigh, sir! May I ask by what right you take upon yourself to speak in that manner of a gentlewoman whom you have never even seen? If this is a specimen of your best manners, you are not fit for the dining-room of Clyffe Hall."

"But is she not my own neesh, Grace?"

"A misfortune of birth, sir, should not expose any person to rudeness. If you are determined to play the gentleman to-day, see you do not forget your part. Dine with us, sir, and welcome; but keep you away in the meantime from the ale-flagon

and the brandy-flask, for—mark me—it would be better for you to drown yourself this day in yonder moat, than to disgrace me and mine at the table of the Clyffards!”

With this unceremonious and conditional invitation to dinner, Mr. Clement Carr was fain to put up, although, when he had obtained it, he did not feel by any means comfortable. The social distinctions after which we strain and strive, with a devotion that would win us heaven, if an attempt were directed to *that* end, are often very disappointing: placed among the gold fish in a sphere far removed from our own, we do not feel at ease; they are only common carp like ourselves, it is true, but we are conscious of the absence of the auriferous scales from our own backs. They are not

lively fish, these gold ones, but their dull, steady stare is extremely disconcerting; and if it were not for the after-pleasure of boasting of our experiences in the crystal bowl, we should generally wish ourselves back in our native pond. The fox who observed that the grapes that hung out of the reach of his moderate exertions were sour, made a very just remark, and one which, in my opinion, by no means deserves the ridicule it has universally met with.

Mr. Clement Carr made every attempt of which he was capable to persuade the dinner-party at Clyffe that he was born with the auriferous scales, but therein signally failed, for he had not a characteristic in common with gold fish except their stupidity. He had determined to establish his character as one of the family, by kissing his

niece, upon his introduction to Miss Mildred Leigh in the drawing-room; but that young lady met him with so dignified and elaborate a courtesy, that he dared not venture upon such an act of violence. Mr. Rupert Clyfard gave him his hand, and uttered a few words of polite welcome in his character of host; but Mr. Raymond drew himself up, and bowed, with no more evidence in that cold and stately curve of a desire to shake hands than is exhibited by the Crescent moon. Dinner *à la Russe* was at that time unknown, but, for frigidity and silence, the meal might have been served upon a steppe of Tartary. At first, Mr. Clement racked his brains for a topic of conversation, but finding nothing but a Dissertation upon the treatment of the Insane, which it fortunately struck him would be in-

opportune, he confined himself to asking everybody, one after another, to take wine; a ceremony which in each case froze him to the marrow. From a scarcity of cutlery, or some other sufficient cause, it was the custom at the Dene to retain one's knife and fork throughout the repast, and Clement stuck to his upon the present occasion, notwithstanding the reiterated efforts of the servants to remove them, with the tenacity of an ensign defending his colours. Upon the other hand, being unaccustomed to a napkin, and imagining it to be the property of the attendant, he pressed it upon his acceptance whenever he came near him; finally, on becoming conscious of both errors, he essayed the first few notes of a whistle, which elsewhere had often stood him in good stead in moments of embarrassment;

but catching his sister's basilisk glance fixed sternly upon him, the tune quavered into silence, and he broke out into a profuse perspiration.

With much greater equanimity, as she had already hinted, could Mrs. Clyffard have borne to see her brother taken out dead and dripping, by the heels, from the castle moat, than thus misbehave himself. She dreaded to leave him alone with those young gentlemen (one of them, too, her sworn foe) when his tongue should be loosened by wine; and yet she could scarcely summon him to leave with the ladies, as though he were a little boy. Nor, indeed, would he have obeyed her. He looked for the departure of the hostess and her niece, as the period when he should begin to recompense himself for past re-

straint, as a gentleman attached to strong liquors, who has taken the Temperance pledge for a limited time, regards the date of his enfranchisement. Nor, when the opportunity arrived, did Mr. Clement Carr throw away his chance. Bumper after bumper, bottle after bottle, did he drink, and still did his youthful host and Mr. Raymond keep him company, as in duty bound. He had now not the slightest difficulty in selecting a topic of conversation, nor in illustrating the same when found, with much inappropriate grimace and gesticulation. He had really some talent for imitating the lower animals, and by the exercise of this accomplishment, he transformed the stately dining-chamber of Clyffe Hall into a dog-kennel, a nursery for kittens, and a sty tenanted by a sow with

a young family. Later in the evening, he arose and caught an imaginary humble-bee in the red damask curtains, and pursued a fictitious mouse upon all-fours, till it found shelter under the sideboard. Never did performer, bent upon making himself agreeable, exhibit before so undemonstrative an audience. Mr. Rupert smiled, but it was with polite amazement. Mr. Raymond smiled, but it was with something like gratified revenge. Yet there was a feeling common to both, though unconfessed by either, which made them regret that their guest's vulgarity was of so very pronounced a type: and it was this same reason which caused the young men to look at one another, with their eyebrows raised, when Mr. Clement Carr expressed his opinion (somewhat tardily) that he had had enough of liquor,

and that it was time to join the ladies.

"I think it is too late," observed Rupert quietly, "to join the ladies to-night; indeed, they have probably left the drawing-room."

"Stuff a nonshensh," returned Mr. Carr; "musht 'av a song. I musht get a song out of Mish Mildred; shmack hér shouldersh elsh."

"What!" exclaimed the brothers, starting up with a single impulse, and regarding their guest with flashing eyes.

"My neesh," exclaimed Mr. Carr, apologetically; "my own neesh, you know. Now which of you young vaga—that is, young gentlemen—are sweet upon her? You, Mr. Rupert, ish it? or ish it you, Mr. Raymond? Ha, ha, I've foundsh you out. Leave me alone for seeing into a"—

"Sir," interrupted Rupert with dignity, "these remarks are most offensive, and must not be repeated. You are not in a fit state to enter a drawing-room."

"Whash a matter with me?" inquired Mr. Carr with virtuous warmth.

"You are drunk," observed Raymond impetuously. "Do not venture to utter that lady's—any lady's name again within my hearing."

"Hoity-toity!" replied the guest; "so it's you who are her sweetheart, is it? Shly dog!"

"What my brother has said," observed Rupert hastily, "is what I feel myself, and what every *gentleman* must feel." He laid a stress upon the word, such as could not escape the observation even of one less sober than the person he addressed.

"Take you care, Rupert Clyffard," answered Clement, stung for the nonce into sober rage. "I have clipped the wings of as fierce bantams as you; you may come some day into my"——

"Your what?" asked a woman's voice, low and clear, as the song of a snake-charmer. "What folly is this you talk, Clement? I am afraid you have been setting these young gentlemen but a bad example. How late you sit over your wine! Mildred has retired to her room, and I should have done likewise, had I not been attracted on my way by what sounded almost like a broil."

"There was no broil, madam," observed Raymond haughtily; "there was only Mr. Clement Carr."

"Whash a matter now?" inquired the

latter gentleman, awakened by the mention of his name from a slumber (induced by his sister's harangue) of the probable duration of two seconds, but which had left his mind a blank as to all past transactions. "Whash a matter, Grace?"

"Follow me, sir, and I will show you your room," observed Mrs. Clyffard icily. "It is the Blue Room, is it not?"

"The besh room in the house," returned Clement triumphantly, "whatever coloursh it is."

She led him up the grand old staircase, ample enough for a hearse and four to pass its fellow—along the picture-gallery, silent, but all eyes, and through an echoing passage, where, from out the dim obscure, four footfalls seemed to come forth to meet their own.

“What a long way to come to bed!” observed Clement, greatly sobered by their cold and lonely travel, as well as by certain apprehensions which were gradually making themselves apparent, pushing their heads up like coral-islands above the ocean of wine which he had swallowed. “And whash my room got three doors for?” Mr. Carr was in a condition when objects are apt to multiply themselves to human vision, but he had not seen treble: there really were three doors to his room, although, when he had previously visited it, to make his toilet before dining with the family, he had not observed them. “Whash the baize-door for?”


“To shut out sound,” returned the lady of Clyffe, in the same sort of tone that the Wolf used when he made the opposite remark to Red Riding-hood—“the better to

hear with, my dear.”—“You should not object to that, brother. There are a good many baize-doors at the Dene.”

If the object of this observation was to console, it certainly failed in its effect. With terror-stricken visage, Clement watched his sister light the huge wax-candles upon the dressing-table, and likewise those upon the lofty mantel-piece, until, what with that stately lustre, and the huge wood-fire upon the hearth, the whole apartment looked designed for some dead Clyfard to lie in state in.”

“Where do you and your husband sleep, Grace?” inquired he, retaining the cold white hand, which would have bidden him adieu, within his own.

“In the east wing, at the other end of the castle.”



“Oh, indeed; and, by the by, if I should be ill in the night—I don’t feel very well now—and should want Cator, where does *he* sleep, Grace?”

“I cannot tell, Clement; but probably over the stable with the grooms. You *would* be lodged in the best bed-room, you know, so you must put up with its little disadvantages. The great folks who have slept here have always had their own attendants about them in the ante-room yonder and in the page’s chamber. There is not even a bell except the alarm-bell”—she pointed to a massive silken cord hanging through a round hole in the ceiling close to the bed-head—“which, should you ring, it would arouse half Craven. Yet even that did not save Sir Thomas. He was found lying stark and stiff here, stabbed to the heart, with his

hand outstretched in vain for yonder rope, though ten score of men-at-arms would have answered his summons. Good night, brother."

She spoke in a harsh and grating voice, but Clement was very loath to lose the sound of it. He accompanied her through the triple door with officious courtesy.

"I suppose I shall be called in time, Grace?"

"Yes, you will be called—soon enough, doubtless. You had better not come with me any further, or you will lose your way back to your chamber." She waved her hand, and left him with a firm, unfaltering step, which evoked its answering footfall from the other end of the passage—that nearest to the Blue Chamber—as before.

"Good night!" cried he, his teeth chatter-

ing with fear, as he listened with positive anxiety to hear once more her familiar accents.

“Good night,” answered she sardonically, as she opened the great door which led into the picture-gallery—“good night, and pleasant dreams.” The quilted door shut behind her with little noise, but her words were repeated by the mocking echoes quite close, as it seemed, to his own ears—“Good night, and pleasant dreams.”

CHAPTER IX.

MR. CLEMENT CARR HAS A BAD NIGHT.

IT has been recorded by inconsiderate admirers of Admiral Lord Nelson, that he never knew what fear was ; if so, he must be held to have been a very fortunate person, but by no means a courageous one ; for true courage can no more exist without sense of danger, than true charity without self-denial ; otherwise, the boldest man in Christendom must have been the Hibernian wood-cutter who sat upon the top-branch of the elm-tree, while he himself was sawing it off ; and the bravest corps that could be

enrolled for any warlike purpose would be one selected from those who had made the most determined attempts at suicide, and who were rather in love with Death than in terror of him. Persons of this callous description might really be utilised to great advantage for assassinating tyrants, or firing powder-magazines from within; but though they might be called patriots, it is doubtful whether Posterity, who is the Law-lord that settles all claims to such titles, would term them Heroes. Now, any bravery which Mr. Clement Carr might possess was of a sort that could not be questioned, when looked at from this point of view. He was by no means ignorant of the nature of fear, but, on the contrary, enjoyed a more delicate appreciation of it than falls to the lot of most men—and even women. He could bear

to see a fellow-creature suffer any amount of pain, physical or mental, without losing his own presence of mind at all; his spirit was indomitable and unflinching in that respect to quite an extraordinary degree; but there his courage ceased. If the pain touched *himself*, his skin was sensitive; if danger threatened, something quailed within him, which he erroneously supposed to be his heart, and his knees had a knack of coming together, which they had certainly not acquired from any habit of devotion. As Mrs. Clyffard had hinted, it had fallen to Clement's lot in life (and he had not repined at it) to shut up a good many persons in desolate rooms with double and even treble doors, designed to exclude sound: in cold and darkness, in hunger and nakedness, he had doomed many to pass just such a

long autumn night as now lay before him; and yet, although he was full of wine and meat, and his apartment was light and even brilliant, and a feather-bed huge enough to accommodate Mr. Brigham Young and half-a-dozen of his consorts, was wooing him to slumber, yet he felt very far from comfortable.

The room was warm, but he shivered like any of those poor wretches whom he had so often beaten, with the humane view (as he humorously told them) of promoting their circulation. He hated and despised them—all the more, perhaps, because from them he drew his means of livelihood—but now, in his splendid solitude, he would not have been sorry for even such company as theirs. Night—solitary Night—was always hateful to Clement; he sometimes dared to

think that the terrors which he habitually suffered at that season, might be some set-off, in the awful Future, against what, by a stretch of severity, might possibly be considered his crimes. And yet he envied his brother Gideon—an indubitably wicked man, harsh and cruel, with nothing genial (such as the skilful imitation of animal noises) about him—who never, by night or day, felt one moment's remorse for the past, one touch of fear for the present. It was probable, indeed, that his death-bed would be a lesson. Clement, who was much the younger, rather looked forward to that, as the starting-place upon a better course of life for himself; he would be a richer man then, and could afford to be better; and, moreover, it would be then time to begin to think about such matters—but in the meanwhile, what

a blessed thing it seemed to be brave like Gideon! Not to fear God—no, he didn't mean that; he really didn't—his cringing mind made base apology, ere the black thought had winged its way across it—but *Not* to fear man or devil! Surely such a bold heart as that must be a great possession. Mr. Clement Carr could not conceal from himself (nor, indeed, from other people) that he *did* fear Man—and this very brother Gideon above all men; and if he did not do his very best to escape the clutches of the Foul Fiend, it was not because he did not fear *him*. He feared the Prince of the Powers of the Darkness very much, as likewise the Powers themselves—Ghosts, Spectres, Portents, Warnings, and as he called them, jestingly, and in the daytime, “crawley-crawlies” of all kinds.

It was not the daytime now, nor was 11 P.M. an hour for jesting. At 11 o'clock A.M. he had replied, as we know, to Cator, speaking about the very apartment he was now occupying: "Who kairsh for the ghost? I shall shleep in the besh room." To what a different frame of mind had twelve hours brought him! Had he only a bottle of brandy, his former audacious sentiments might perhaps be induced to return. The servants had not yet retired for the night. Why should he not ring, and, upon pretence of sudden indisposition, demand that cordial? But had not his sister told him that there was no bell to ring except — His eyes wandered to the spot where, a few minutes ago, she had pointed to him the massive rope of the alarm-bell hanging by the bedside. It was not a thing to

escape even a very cursory glance, yet all his looking for it was now in vain; it was not there at all, and nothing remained to tell of it save the round dark hole in the ceiling, through which it must have been withdrawn, watching the pillow of Sir Thomas's deathbed like a baleful eye. Upon this depressing discovery, Mr. Clement Carr's first impulse was to leave the apartment forthwith, and demand lodgment with Mr. William Cator, even though he should become a laughing-stock to that strong-minded individual to the end of his days; but the truth was, he dared not face the echoing passage, and the long gallery of frowning Clyffards, through which he must needs pass before he could come within call of any human being. His next idea was to render himself as safe as might be from

the incursion of any ghostly enemy in his present quarters. To this end he made a thorough inspection of the whole apartment with a wax-candle in each hand, like the manager of a theatre shewing Majesty the way to its Box. Besides the triple door by which he had entered, there were two other doors, and when he opened these he exchanged one of the candles for a poker. The first led into an anteroom as large as any ordinary bedroom, but totally unfurnished, save for some things which looked uncommonly like coffin trestles, but which were doubtless the raw material of truckle-beds, to be used by the attendants of the great man who reposed in the Blue Chamber; other doors led from this room, he knew not whither, but he cut off all communication with it by lock and bolt. The

second door opened upon a very small room, almost a recess, the purpose of which he could not guess; if it was for the accommodation of a page, it must have been a very 'duodecimo one that slept there. It would have served rather as a wardrobe for cloaks and hats, only there were no pegs; the shining floor was uncarpeted, and in the centre was a square, looking suspiciously like a trap-door. Doubtless, the persons who had murdered Sir Thomas had come up that way, while his servants guarded the anteroom in vain. Again Mr. Clement Carr plied lock and bolt; and having in the same manner made his triple door secure, felt even then no safer than Robinson Crusoe with his ladders drawn up, upon the day when he first saw the footprint in the sand.

How was it possible he should be comfortable with that round hole staring at him through the ceiling? Moreover, the fire was dying out, and there was no fresh fuel. Mr. Clement looked at the four-candles, wishing them four-and-twenty, and proceeded to put two of them out, for it was necessary to husband his resources, lest the night should be rendered still more hideous by darkness. First, however, at the imminent risk of reducing Clyffe Hall to ashes, Mr. Carr pushed a lighted candle under the bed, and examined every article of furniture with the particularity of a broker; then having sounded the walls minutely, which fully maintained their reputation of being sixteen feet thick, he began to flatter himself that there was not much to be afraid of after all. For with respect

to ghostly enemies, it is singular enough that we take precisely the same precautions against them as against material foes, such as burglars, and that even the most superstitious of us would prefer a lock upon his bedroom door to a horse-shoe, and the charms of a revolver to those of the most accredited exorcist. Mr. Clement Carr pursued his nightly toilet with not a few uncomfortable lookings-back over his shoulder; and having wrapped his dressing-gown around him, took a chair by the enormous fireplace, and proceeded to warm his stockinged feet at the fast-waning embers, before he got into bed.


This is a position in which nobody has ever yet indulged without falling into what is called a "brown study." As the wood-fire glows and pales, as the sparks come

forth and vanish, so the memories of the Past, now distinct, now dim, follow one another without our guidance, or schemes for the Future shape themselves as the clouds before the wind. There are none of us but have a history, more deeply interesting to ourselves than all the scrolls of Fame, and we love to linger over the pictures it presents, "rolling the sweet morsel under the tongue"—even when we are well aware that it would have been better for us had some of them remained unpainted. It would have been well for Clement Carr had the long canvas of his past been white and recordless as the minds of those poor wretches whom it was his calling to tend, so ugly were the scenes displayed well-nigh from first to last as it unrolled, and yet it gave him pleasure to review them—al-

though not all. He remembered with gloomy satisfaction the circumstances under which their first patient had been confided to their care, and how the hush-money got to be larger every year—only a little less than blood-money, and almost as ill-earned; and how, having thus discovered a short way to wealth, they had stuck to it, Gideon and he, though the road was dark and foul, and in places perilous; very dangerous, indeed, when Gilbert Lee, whose mad idea that he was sane had been so shared in by Mildred's mother, that she plotted his escape from the Dene, and afterwards married him. Perhaps, after all, that marriage saved the Carr system from unpleasant publicity; but how he hated his dead sister, and her dead husband, and the living offspring of the two, who had treated him so supercili-

ously that very evening! She should smart for that yet, if opportunity occurred, which it generally does, when we have our revenges to gratify. Then, on the other hand, what a match had Grace made! He loved her, it is true, no better than her elder sister, but he couldn't help being proud of her. How well contrived must have been all those pretended attentions to mad Cyril, directed in reality at Ralph himself, to have so bewitched the Clyffard, even at a spot so hateful to him by association as the Dene. How many ladies of high degree had striven for that prize, and failed! How many women in other days, as beautiful as she, and better born, had ruled at Clyffe by a far different title!

There was the "fair lady," for instance, for whose sake Bertram slew his brother.



Cator had pointed out to him that day where oak had been laid on the great staircase, to hide the blood-stained spot where Gervaise Clyffard fell; and yet, enchantress as she was, she had been the wife of neither. It was she who was said to "walk," combing her long tresses as she went, when any great calamity threatened the family; and it had been even whispered that the master of Clyffe had been, but a few nights back, forewarned, by her appearance, of his brother Cyril's death. That was a bad business for him (Clement) as well as Gideon. A great annual sum had been paid for many years for his custody, which would no longer swell the Carr revenues, unless, indeed, another Clyffard should be sent to take his place. More unlikely things, however, than that might happen, and truly, as

Cator was used to say, "Miss Grace as was was a very clever woman." Still, unless it was to her own advantage, she would never move in the matter; she was all for herself was Grace. Gideon, it is true, sometimes got her to do things—but for him (Clement), she would not wag a finger—and even Gideon had always to give her a *quid pro quo*. What scheme had she now in hand with this girl Mildred? She surely could hardly dream of a *double* alliance with the Clyffard family; and besides, why should she benefit one to whose dead parents she owed such a grudge? She had been more angry at their marriage than even he or Gideon, and why then did she patronise and protect this girl, and ask her to Clffye, and set her up—confound her—above her own——

Here an incident occurred which put a stop to Mr. Clement Carr's "brown study," and made him very wide awake indeed to the fact that he was in the Blue Chamber at Clyffe Hall. It was simply a sigh, it is true, but a sigh of the profound sort, such as is produced only by the most heartfelt sorrow, or the most complicated troubles of the digestion—a sigh that filled the room with its melancholy monotone, and was uttered, as it seemed, by some invisible being close beside him, who might have been warming *his* legs by the self-same decaying fire, preparatory to retiring to the self-same bed. So certain was Mr. Clement Carr of the proximity of the sound, that he did not even cast a glance up at the hole in the ceiling, from whence it might naturally have been expected to proceed, but

sat glued to his chair, with his hair on end, carrying, *nem. con.*, in his own mind, all sorts of resolutions for living a spotless life for the remainder of his days. He had no more reason to doubt of this thing having occurred (as, indeed, it *had* occurred) than that he was sitting by the mere remnants of a wood fire, and that the oak floor had no carpet, and would presently grow cold to his feet; yet such is the marvellous elasticity of the human mind, that, when the sound was not repeated, the idea began to grow within him that, after all, it might only have been a creation of his fancy, or that perhaps it had been his own sigh that he had heard. People often sighed without knowing it; nothing was more——

With one agile spring, which must have

taxed every muscle of his ponderous body, Mr. Clement Carr here bounded into bed; for the sigh had again broken forth, and this time most certainly not from his own fluttering heart, although almost as near. Let us not bear too hardly upon this unhappy man. Mr. Banting himself, previous to his miraculous discovery, would have done his best to "jump" under similar circumstances. "There are few things," says a standard writer, "more appalling than a sound of which we can give no explanation." There is no wonder, then, that Mr. Carr sat listening for more sighs, with a thumping in his ear like that of a steam-engine. After an hour or so of this frightful state of anticipation, he ventured to relieve his stiffened limbs by lying down; then, still listening, and with the engine still

beating within, but with fainter strokes, drowsiness fell upon him, and presently blessed sleep, that falls, like the rain of heaven, even upon the most unjust, and holds them (let us hope), while it lasts, as innocent as the best of us.

When he awoke, which he did suddenly, and to the consciousness of all the horrors of his situation, the room was no longer illumined by artificial light, but dimly by the moon. The fire had, of course, gone out, but the two candles which had been left burning on the mantel-piece, although no longer lit, had certainly not burned out, for there they stood as high, it seemed, as when he had last seen them. While he wondered much at this phenomenon, Mr. Clement's attention was called to the dressing-table by a third sigh, quite equal to

its predecessors in depth of feeling. Before the glass sat a female form, in a loose black robe, engaged upon some article of needle-work. Her features could scarcely be discerned, but her figure was youthful, and her auburn hair flowed over her shoulders like a river of gold. Well might she sigh, considering the task she was engaged upon. An enormous piece of linen lay upon her lap, its whiteness contrasting forcibly with her black dress; the moonbeams exhibited this but a few moments ere thick darkness closed the scene; yet even in that scanty time, Clement Carr knew that he had seen the Phantom of Clyffe—the Fair Lady sewing a shroud. To be alone with this spectre, without light, without knowing how near she might be to him, and yet to know that she was there, he

felt to be absolutely intolerable, and the wretched man gathered himself up with the courage of despair for a rush at the triple door; but just as he was in act to spring, the whole floor of the room seemed, with one ponderous crash, to give way together, and, shrinking from the unknown abyss, Clement Carr fell back upon his pillow, and fainted from sheer extremity of terror.

CHAPTER X.

EAVES-DROPPING.

WHEN Mr. Clement Carr “came to himself,” he came to himself alone; it was broad daylight too, and cheerful sounds of life—such as the champing of horses and the clanking of milk-pails—came up from some region beneath. But the shock had been too severe for the effects of it to be removed from Clement’s system by any ordinary means. All he saw only reminded him of what he had suffered. There were the grey embers of the wood-fire beside which he had shuddered at the mysterious

sigh; the empty chair on which the Fair Lady had sat beside the toilet-table engaged in her ghastly occupation; the polished floor, apparently as safe and solid as ice after three weeks' frost, but which he scarcely dared to set his feet upon, after the proof he had so lately experienced of its instability. All the doors were locked just as he had left them, with their keys inside, and yet he had seen what he had seen.

Shaving was a difficult matter with Mr. Carr that morning, and a very woebegone countenance he presented to the looking-glass. I do not say that his hair had turned grey in that single night—although I have known such an occurrence to happen in the case of a gentleman who unexpectedly left off wearing a wig—but he

unquestionably looked like one who had passed a very bad night indeed. Mr. Carr concealed his features from the servant who called him that morning, by means of a pocket-handkerchief, but he could not be making a pretence of blowing his nose the whole day long. Thus, happening, upon his way in search of Cator, with orders to prepare for their immediate departure from that accursed roof, to meet Mr. Raymond Clyffard at the library door, that gentleman, after a stiff greeting, could not but remark, "I fear, sir, you have slept but ill."

"Ill is no word for it, Mr. Raymond; I've—— But perhaps it is not agreeable to the family to talk about such things."

"Come in here, Mr. Carr," said the young man, ushering him into the common

home of arms and literature. "Now, sit you there, and tell me what has disturbed you."

He pointed to a high-backed chair, carved thick with hounds and hunters, in which poor Clement looked like the sham-governor of Barataria; while he himself, toying with an antique goblet of very curious workmanship, stood leaning against a mighty tome of black-letter—such as Don Quixote would have loved—and listened.

Not one word did Raymond utter throughout the other's somewhat long and rambling narrative; but when he had quite finished, he quietly observed, "Tis a strange story, Mr. Carr, and more than strange if true."

"True, sir?"

"Nay, I mean no offence; you may lie, and yet not know it. You took claret

enough last night to raise a dozen ghosts."

"Mr. Raymond Clyffard," returned Clement with that unmistakably earnest air with which a man who is not an habitual truth-teller narrates a genuine fact, "I saw the Fair Lady of your House last night, and no other, as surely as that is a drinking-cup which you are holding in your hand,* and nothing else."


"As surely," replied Raymond smiling, "but not more so. Mark, now, how the eye may be deceived. This is indeed a goblet, in a sense; but see—I tilt it ever so little, and this trigger lets loose a pistol-ball which smites the drinker dead. This is the stirrup-cup of the good old times, in which not to pledge one's host at parting, was to offend him grievously. And yet, in truth, it is a mere show of wickedness.

There is no precision in a thing like this. If the bullet sped at all, I wager it would fly aslant. But the common mind delights to think it deadly; and because we have possession of such weapons, and because the house is old, and Crimes and Vice have played their parts in it, as needs must be in any house *so* old, hence come these vulgar tales of apparitions, noises—things you think you see or hear.”

“I saw them and I heard them,” answered Clement obstinately; “there was no ‘think’ about it.”

“Then let there be no talking about it either, sir,” said Raymond sternly. “We have had too much of such fooling. If it be your pleasure to leave Clyffe Hall so soon”—

“This very morning,” quoth Clement resolutely.



"Then let me beg of you in courtesy not to repeat—at least not within these walls—what you have just told to me. I will do what I can to fathom the mystery, and be sure, if I discover anything, that you shall know it."

Clement gave the required promise with some show of frankness, and left the room, observing that he had business with his servant, and must needs go in person, for that he wished to see how his horse fared, which had shewn signs of suffering from his recent journey.

"A liar to the backbone," muttered Raymond Clyffard, "and I, a fool, to appeal to the honour of such a rogue! And yet he seemed to speak the truth a while ago—ah, Mildred, dearest!"

They were very like, those two; as like

as youth and girl could be! The one swarthy as Night, with lustrous starlike eyes; the other as the mellow eve, what time the nightingale begins his melody, and the glowworm trims her lamp to light her love.

"Hush!" said she, closing the door behind her softly, and laying her finger on her lips; "in this room, Raymond, never speak so loud. Nay, no room is safe, nowhere but Ribble."

"Let us go to Ribble, then."

"Not now. I dare not do it. I sought you here to warn you—I wish I could say aid you—my own Raymond."

She lingered on her words, as the lark lingers over her own sweet song, and gazed upon him, and then drooped her eyelids, like one who, looking at the sun, is blinded

with excess of light, yet longs to look again.

“What is it, Mildred, dear? More schemes, more stratagems? Why, this good woman your aunt is busier than a spider.”

“Ay, and as fell, as ruthless. When she works *me* harm—I fear her—ah, how I fear her!—but now that she is plotting against *you*, Raymond, I seem to fear her no more; I *hate* her. She has poisoned your poor father’s mind against you.”

“She did that long ago, Mildred,” sighed the young man.

“Ay, but not to the bitter end, as now. She aims at nothing less than to get you expelled from this roof, that she may reign here the more supreme. She swung her first mesh across but yesterday—she told • me so herself—and day by day her net

will grow, I know; and Raymond—I—she”——

Mildred paused, and as the glory of the fruit of Tangiers shews through its scented rind, so did her blushes rise.

“She is not going to send *you* away, Mildred?” interposed her lover anxiously. “If so, I shall believe, indeed, that the Fair Lady prognosticates misfortune.”

“What mean you? Have you seen her?”

“Nay, not *I*, ifaith; but this man Carr, your uncle—God save the mark!—has seen, or so he says, the Warning but last night in the Blue Chamber. All the doors were locked, and yet a lady with long auburn hair, and in a black dressing-gown, intrudes herself, and practises plain needlework. This he will carry to his sister, she to my●

father, and we know with what dire effect. He will deem it bodes another Death."

"In a black dressing-gown," mused Mildred Leigh; "with auburn hair; and in the state-room too. Did Mr. Carr say anything had happened to the floor?"

"Ay, the fool swore that all the floor fell in."

"Dear Raymond," said the young girl earnestly, "I see some sunlight where I looked not for it: you are not yet turned out of your own home. If I am not mistaken, Aunt Grace is playing a very dangerous game. I will watch her narrowly, and, if she has no mercy for *thee*, so help me Heaven, I will shew none to *her*. She gave me thee, it is true, a priceless gift, but never meant to give; and

● now"——

"Now what, dear Mildred? What is it that threatens you, and therefore me? And how can anything that happened in the Blue Chamber help us?"

"It is a long story, Ray, and this is neither the time nor the place to tell it. There is darkest plotting, and we must counterplot. At three o'clock meet me at the mouth of Ribble Cave—then"——

"I hear the cat," exclaimed Raymond softly. "Puss, puss, puss!"

The door opened; Mrs. Clyffard entered, and darting a suspicious glance from one to the other, observed coldly, "Mildred, the breakfast waits; go make the tea, child." The young girl left the room.

"Mr. Raymond Clyffard, I am directed by your father"——

"Nay, madam," interrupted he with mock,

politeness; "my father has been directed by you."

"Has been directed by *me*, then, if you will have it so," continued his step-mother carelessly, "to request, if your sporting engagements will permit of it, that you will partake his evening meal with him."

"My father is very kind," said Raymond frankly; he had not had such an invitation for many months, and he was greatly pleased.

"Very kind," repeated Mrs. Clyffard, icily. "I hope you will prove yourself deserving of his kindness."

"We shall be alone, I conclude, Mrs. Clyffard?" inquired Raymond, his suspicions roused by the sarcastic tones of his step-mother.

"Oh, quite alone, sir; and I thank you

for the implied compliment. No envious eyes will witness your interesting interview; no alien ear will overhear your generous confidences."

"Then we shall meet in some room which has no keyhole," remarked Raymond scornfully, and with his hand upon the door. "If you have no other commands, madam, I will rid you of my presence."

In silence they interchanged one look of mutual defiance, the man's eye flashing contempt, the woman's hatred, and then the oak closed between them.

"I listen, do I?" muttered the woman to herself. "You have found out so much, have you? He calls me cat, and that to Mildred, too. Why were they here together at all? She dare not love him—no, she dare not, for her life. She knows that I

would kill her if she did. And yet they were making tryst. 'At the mouth of Ribble Cave at three.' The cat caught that at least."

CHAPTER XI.

RUPERT'S WOOING.

WHEN Mildred reached the chamber where Mrs. Clyffard and herself were accustomed to take their morning meal together, she found Rupert awaiting her. It was strange enough to see him there, for, to her knowledge, he had not set foot within that room three times since she had been at Clyffe; but it was worse than strange, since her aunt must needs have sent her thither to meet him. How different he looked from his brother, whom she had just left; the one bright, strong, and

joyous, the other sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. And yet he was fair to look upon; his wealth of light-brown hair crowned a noble forehead; his well-cut features shewed his gentle birth; while the deep-sunk eyes he fixed upon her with melancholy longing were very soft and kind.

"Mildred," said he frankly, "your aunt has bid me hither for a purpose which it will not be hard for you to guess, remembering what has already passed between us. For my part, I would fain have deferred to press a suit which has so lately met with coldness, if not rejection; but she says I do not know the way to a maiden's heart. My wooing, mayhap, has been unapt and clumsy?"

"Nay, Rupert; you have been courteous

and gentle in your love, as in all else. Never was homage from a noble heart more nobly proffered. No girl could hope to have a wooer more"—

"Words, words, words!" interrupted Rupert wearily, "all ending in a 'but,' as at the bottom of the sparkling bowl the poison lurks. I thought—but it was she who bade me think—that this time something else than pity, Mildred"—

"Pity, Rupert?"

"Ay, for you must pity me, since I think you do not hate me, and alas! you do not give back love for love. You see me—what I am; a youth, yet very sad; one rich in this world's goods, yet poor beyond the poorest, since you refuse to share them. And yet you see not half my evil case, and know not half what it is in

your power to confer. Look you. If a man like me besought your hand in marriage, and you loved him not, yet if, besides, he lay in peril of his life, and could only by your wedding him be saved—would you wed him then, for pity's sake, if not for love's, hoping that love would come?"

"Such a thing could not be, Rupert. It is idle to speak of it."

"But if it *were*, I say. What then?"

"I would do my very best to save him."

"You *would*!" cried Rupert joyfully.

"God bless you for those words! One kiss, sweet Mildred—nay, pardon me; I had forgotten; my soul is drunk with love. How my heart beats—how my brain whirls! Pent up within these walls, I suffocate. How cool and calm yon moat looks! Will you take boat with me, and

let me row you round the castle-walls, as I have often done before, and tell you there, where you have listened to so many tales of mine, but none so pitiful as this, the thing I have to say."

Never was man so changed in such brief space as Rupert while he spoke these words; his pale cheeks glowed with pleasure; his large eyes beamed with hope; his head, which thought and study were wont to bow, was held erect.

It pained Mildred to the core to say, "You are clinging to a shadow, Rupert. Though your talk is unintelligible to me, I feel you are encouraging a baseless hope." Yet she did say it bravely.

"But you *will* come?" cried he, no whit discouraged by her words. "You will hear what I have to say? But stay—you have

not yet breakfasted. Alas! what a selfish wretch I am!"

"I could not eat, Rupert, just now. I am quite ready to hear what you have to say, although I warn you it will be useless pleading."

They wound down a private stair to a low arched door that opened on the castle terrace, then betwixt the grey wall, teeming with fruit, and the lichen-covered balusters, whereon the peacock strutted and flirted his feathers in the sun, they walked side by side; down the broad stone steps, bordered with scarlet flowers in massy urns, on to the shaven lawn, and so to the brink of the black moat, all starred by water-lilies. Here they took boat, and Rupert oared them to the middle of the sluggish stream, then rested on his oars, and broke the autumn silence.

"Dear Mildred, I have looked forward to this hour for many and many a day. *Here*, I have often thought—often when we were together, but as boy and girl, brother and sister, not as now—I will one day tell her all; here where we have passed whole summer days, and she has seen me at my best and merriest (if, indeed, I have been ever merry), seems the fittest place. Nor sea nor stream can ever be so dear to me as this same moat: alone I have listened here for hours to the croak of the slow-flapping rook, and the cock-crow, half-choked, half-clear, from the distant farm, and never wished for better music. But that was before I heard your voice, sweet Mildred!" Here he paused a moment, then resumed reflectively, "How slowly the waters creep, as though they loved to linger about this

ancient place, and were loath to leave it for the hurrying river; and yet, see, they are dark as Death, and the bottom is choked with trailing weed. So has it been with the Clyffards themselves, Mildred. We have kept ourselves so long from the great tide of life, that we have grown stagnant, and—and—what is stagnant is unhealthy. Where there is nothing to hasten the pulse, to stir the blood, the mind itself will sooner or later grow”—he was looking at her, she felt, so fixedly that she dared not raise her eyes to meet his gaze—“will grow—lethargic.”

“*You* are not lethargic, Rupert.”

“Not yet,” said he; “I trust not yet.”

There was a pathos in his low earnest tone that might have almost moved a slighted woman; no wonder, then, that it pierced Mildred’s heart.

"Dear Rue," she murmured, "it is not well to speak of such things as these."

"But how much worse," sighed he, "to think of them, and not to speak. Oh, do not think that I am hoodwinked, Mildred, by aught that men can say or leave unsaid about poor me. I know the falseness of their assuring speech, as I know the reason of their silence—their 'Hush! Rupert is coming; not one word about the Curse.'"

"Rue, Rue, dear Rue," sobbed Mildred tenderly, "this is the very thing you should not do, the very talk"—

"Nay, Mildred, hear me out. Oh, do not—do not join them in that cuckoo-note. Oh, do not you turn against me, my one hope."

"Against you, Rupert? *I—I?* When there is not a groom in Clyffe that does not love you."

“Ay; but not as I would have *you* love. And if you turn not to me, Mildred, you will work more against me than if all the world besides had sworn my ruin. Oh, how to tell you—how to let you know what hangs upon your answer, and yet not fright you, Mildred! Nay, tremble not, sweetest; you have nought to fear, whether your ‘yes’ shall bathe my life in sunshine, or your ‘no’ provoke the threatening moon to swift eclipse!”

His tones were earnest, but not wild; and though far from mechanically, he spoke as one who has well conned beforehand the substance of what he has to say.

“You are very young,” said Mildred after a little, “and yet have lived your life here amid the mouldering past, afar from all things that befit the young. Your

childhood, soon deprived of a mother's care—like mine, Rupert—has been passed among menials, who, flattering themselves they were pleasing you, pleased their own vulgar natures by feeding an imagination, hungry as flame, with stories of your ancient house, exaggerated, false, and monstrous histories, but which, since they were about the Clyfards, seemed in some sort real. They sowed an evil seed in a soil fertile enough in fancies of its own, but rich and ready to the hand of the true husbandman, had such there been. How soon would yonder well-trimmed garden left to itself become mere wilderness, and how much sooner if you planted it with docks and darnels?"

"Go on, sweet Mildred; these are Raymond's words, but in your mouth how welcome—welcome as the dawn—welcome as the

soft-falling summer rain upon the aching head and stretched-out hands."

"Raymond is wise, Rupert, although he has little book-learning."

"I know it, girl, yet he cannot comfort me as you can. The uneasy pillow of the sick man cannot be smoothed save by one loving hand; and royal Edward's wound, be sure, would not have healed so swiftly had any lips sucked forth the poison save those of his true wife." Then pausing for a moment, he added in an earnest whisper, "There is poison in *my* blood, Mildred, and you must be my Eleanor."

"Nay, Rupert; there is no poison in your blood, but, as you said yourself, it flows too sluggishly; you need employment, action—you should leave home a while."

"What!" he broke forth, "without *you*?

Never—no, never, Mildred! Be mine, and I will go with you whither you will, and do your bidding, whatsoever it be. But I will never leave you, be sure of that, my girl: you shall escape me never, no, not in death itself; for if you die, then will I die too, and climb up after you to highest heaven, though it were from the abyss of hell. *Then* surely, being a blessed spirit crowned and palmed, you would reach out a saintly hand to lift me into bliss, and save my soul; and therefore *now*, being an earthly angel, will you not give me that same hand, and save—ah, save *my Reason?*”

The dews of terror stood upon Mildred's brow, for wild and vehement as was Rupert's speech, his eyes spoke things more terrible. All of a sudden she knew that that which

she had been combating for his sake as a mere shadow, was a substantial evil which had already fallen upon him. Poor Rupert had all along been right; she was talking with a Madman! And yet she pitied him far more than feared him even now. The passionate yearning of his last appeal melted her heart within her.

"The case I put in yonder room," he continued, "was my own—for is not madness Death?—and hence my soul was glad as yonder bird's what time you said, 'I would do my very best to save him.' Come, Mildred, say you will once more."

The feathered thief in view of the fruit upon the terrace-wall was caroling his blithest; note on note he poured forth his melodious joy a while, then bringing his last harmonies together, like a hasty grace, he flew down

to the ripening pears. Then in the songless silence, Mildred answered Rupert, "So help me Heaven, I will do my very best to save you." She spoke not without thought—for while a black-bird sings is time enough to serve a nimble brain—and while she spoke she watched him narrowly.

"My life, my love, my all!" murmured he in a hushed rapture.

"But, Rupert——"

"Nay," he interrupted; "mar not the music of your last rich words. I guess what you would say, and therefore there is no need to speak. You do not love me yet—I know it, but in time 'tis possible—— There, there, I *give* you time—I can keep my soul in patience, being sure of you; hopeful that the bud of Pity may flower into something sweeter, and being sure that

when it does so bloom, it blows for *me*—for *me* !”

Across his voice, faint and aswoon with love, came Mrs. Clyffard’s clear and peremptory tones from the balcony outside her breakfast-room, “Mildred, the breakfast waits, dear child. Good Rupert, put her ashore.”

The young man obeyed at once, and as he took Mildred’s fingers in his own to hand her to the bank, gave them a significant squeeze. Far from returning this, she bowed to him haughtily, and walked hastily away.

“Ungenerous!” murmured she to herself, almost in tears, “and unlike a gentleman! I could not have believed it of a Clyffard. Not mad, indeed, but cunning as the maddest: had love been mine to give, I verily believe he would have won it. False and

unfair! Does he suppose I took his dropped kerchief for a water-lily, or that I was blind to her answering signal? And did she ever speak to us like that before?—‘*dear Mildred,*’ and ‘*good Rupert!*’ My loving aunt must take me for a fool indeed.”

CHAPTER XII.

RIBBLE CAVE.

THE hills about Craven, if they are not mountains in the eyes of members of the Alpine Club, are believed to be such by the inhabitants of the district, who (one would think) ought to know. At all events, they are very high hills indeed for poor England, which has of late years been understood to be a flat country. The boastful local proverb—

Penyghent, Pendle, and Ingleborough,
Are the *highest* hills the country thorough—

is not, indeed, quite correct. In Mr. Hurt-

ley's *Craven*, the height of Ingleborough, as measured by "a famous pedestrian"—we should imagine Mr. Walker—is given at five thousand two hundred and eighty feet, or about two thousand feet higher than Helvellyn; but this is a slight exaggeration. Like a county magnate who lives close to the Lord Lieutenant, the Craven hills are minified by the neighbourhood of their High Mightinesses the Lords of Lakeland, by many of which they are overtopped. Still, as I have said, they are very lofty, and command a great range of view. From the crown of Ribble, for instance, there was (and is) a splendid view. To westward lay the unchangeable sea, flecked by many a sail as now, although no smoke-pennon flew from steamship; while over the perilous sand-road athwart Morecambe Bay you might

see, when the tide was low, great companies of people, both on horseback and in wheeled conveyances, where now there are but a very few. How picturesque those little caravans must have looked as they crossed the waste of sand, which in a few hours the swirling sea would devour, silent and swift; how lovely that level way, from which every trace of man's travel was swept away every day! Then the crescent bays, white as the moon, with the boats lying high and dry in them; the belts of woodland descending to the very water's edge; and Kent and Leven sweeping from the rich green hills in many a shining curve! The top of Ribble was also a sight in itself, having a shaven crown where a Druidical circle once had stood—a very priest of hills; and yet were none of these glories to be com-

pared with the wondrous wealth which lay within him. I do not speak of the gold and silver coins—centuries old—which in flood-time one of his streams would cast out (as it does yet) from some far-hidden treasury, but of the glittering palace, built, doubtless, for the king of the fairies, but which had lapsed for many a year into mortal hands, and was termed by them Ribble Cave.

Surely, of all discoveries which have power to charm the human soul, that of a stalactite cavern must be the chiefest. To be the first to descry a new continent, or even an island unmarked in any chart, must be a striking sensation; the watcher of the skies, too, when a new planet “swims into his ken,” must enjoy a great experience; but neither of these sensations seems so

overwhelming as that which I have in my mind. For suppose—and I am only supposing what has happened—that I have lived within the shadow of a great hill all my life, which the learned inform me is of limestone, and that my forefathers for many generations have lived by the same hill without further information about it, if so much; and suppose there is a cavern in that hill, of no very interesting character, described by the authorities to be mainly “calcareous secretion,” which has been used by myself and my progenitors as a stabling for cattle in bad weather—well, during an autumn thunder-storm, I take shelter in this spot alone, and with a pickaxe which happens to be there, I amuse or warm myself by picking into the hill. What follows? Why, a mighty stream of water, from

which I escape with difficulty, and which takes a quarter of an hour to rush away, and renders the neighbouring stream too big for its banks. Never since the Rock of Horeb was there surely such a miracle. Awe-stricken, and yet delighted, I approach the aperture, which the flood has vastly enlarged, and behold—a gloom profound, a depth of darkness, I do not know how deep, but at all events Space where heretofore had been thought to be Solidity. Columbus, it is true, discovered solidity where there was thought to be space, but the wonder is no less because the conditions happen to be reversed. Thus far, then, Columbus and I are equal, but from this point he cannot hold a candle to me. If he could, and brought it to my newly-discovered cavern, what a treasure-house of

Fairyland would be revealed! "Stalactite and stalagmite," observes the geologist pompously. Presumptuous fool! what thy dull science teaches thee is the least part of the wonder.

For how many thousand years have these columns of crystal, these sparkling and pendulous transparencies, full of hidden music, had their glorious being? For whom were these stately halls devised in darkness, and for whom furnished with such unearthly pomp? What forms, what spirits, have threaded these winding passages, carpeted with silver sand, upon which no mortal foot since man was made has trodden save mine own? Whence springs, and whither leads this sunless stream, whose murmur, pregnant with a mystery almost divine, has never fallen upon human ear before? Why

should these wonders have been locked so fast, that no grateful tongue—at least of man—has ever given to God the glory of them? And was it chance that laid the secret bare at last, through me; and but for me, for thousands of years to come, would still these unimaginable splendours have been veiled from human eyes—this hill have been a hill like other hills? Somewhat after this fashion, surely, might any man speak who has made a discovery, such as that which we are considering. Now, this very thing had happened in Ribble Fell, and not so very many years before the period of which we write, as to rob it of its Wonder. But people in those days—as we have had occasion to observe before—were not so enamoured of Nature as at present, and listened somewhat apatheti-

cally to any secret she might have to tell them. The glories of earth, and sea, and sky were for the most part lost upon them; with much conventional veneration and superstition, they were terribly at ease in the true Sion, and regarded all natural phenomena with the stoicism of savans. Two or three hundred folks had visited Ribble Cave upon its first discovery; but by this time visitors had become rare. A professed guide to underground Ribble did indeed reside in the hamlet of Clyffe; but if he had not followed some other calling in addition, he would have made but an indifferent livelihood. Not above a dozen times that summer had he been seen escorting strangers through the park upon their way to the cave. The entrance to it was just beyond the deer-fence, and where

the fell commenced; a wild and desolate spot, where a stream ran down a deep and woodless ravine, with Ribble upon one side with its subterranean palace, and on the other a still loftier hill, whose "pastures," separated by natural walls of limestone, presented the appearance of a gigantic fortification.

Here, at the hour appointed, Mildred and Raymond met. She had more than once visited the cave, in company with members of the family; while he was familiar with every part of it, with certain exceptions. It was known that the excavations—if such they can be called—were far more extensive than those chambers, lofty and far-stretching as they were, which visitors could explore. The stream which accompanied their steps wherever they went, had

its exit at the other extremity of the hill; and outside it, could here and there be heard, by laying the ear to the ground, flowing in places where it was known that the frequented subterranean passages did not exist. Before the pickaxe had let the light into Ribble, such sounds had, of course, been ascribed to the Devil, nor had he even now lost all the credit of them. From the main passage there forked short ones, right and left, but they all ended more or less abruptly, in some hall or grotto; so, provided that you kept your torch alight, there was little danger of losing your way. The visitor who wished to penetrate to the extremity, had only to follow the windings of the stream, between which and the shining wall there was always room for him, and he could not fail to reach his

goal—a splendid chamber, domed with glittering spars, in one dark corner of which his guide, the stream, sped away under a low-browed arch, beyond which no man, save one, had ever followed it. Raymond Clyffard alone had ventured once, with a lighted candle fastened to his forehead, to trust himself to the mysterious stream. Deep and dark it ran for a short distance, with only a few inches between the rock and it, and then emerged into a hall, more vast and beautiful—so the adventurer declared—than any it had yet visited. From hence, as it seemed to him, the stream dipped suddenly, forming a sort of cataract in a tunnel, down which, if a man should go, it was certain he would never return. It was feat enough to have visited Finis Hall, as Raymond had entitled it, and

that experience had never been repeated.

Familiar, however, as both he and Mildred were with the subterranean glories of Ribble, they could not repress exclamations of delight as each, with torch in hand—the materials for exploration being always to be found in the external cave or cattle-stable—came suddenly upon some crystal wonder which flashed into being at their approach. They seemed by tacit consent to have postponed the talk, which they had come thither to hold without interruption, until they had reached “the Cathedral,” as the domed chamber was not inaptly termed. Moreover, sustained conversation was rendered difficult by the nature of the way, which sometimes was so narrow that it necessitated their walking one behind the other, and sometimes was so low that they

had to creep with their heads bent. It was from a sort of tunnel of this kind that they emerged at last, after a quarter of a mile of fairyland, into the stately place that was the last of the suite of royal apartments which (I fear without King Oberon's permission) had been thrown open to the public. The two torches were not sufficient to evoke the splendours of the lofty roof: properly illuminated from beneath, it shewed like a magnificent mass of candelabra, but now it only twinkled here and there, like stars out of the darkness. It seemed as though so vast a superstructure must needs have pillars for its support, and the fairy architect, as if in anticipation of such an idea, had mocked the eye with crystal columns, separated, as it seemed at first, by violence in the centre, but which

had in truth never been joined ; the one half rising from the silver floor, the other pendent from the crystal ceiling. From the ceiling, too, hung mighty icicles, like the pipes of an organ, which, being struck, emitted a melancholy music, that went wailing through chamber after chamber, as though in sorrow for their departed tenants. Here and there, the stalagmites took forms very similiar to the human, though generally with the head or arms missing, like torsos in a sculpture-gallery ; but almost in the centre of the place there was a natural statue—for it really might be called so, so perfect were its proportions—of a woman with a child in her arms ; a very Lot to look at, though not of salt but crystal, and only a little above the average life-size.

“That is certainly very like,” observed

Mildred with a shudder, as they came upon this wonder. "Was there really any truth in the story which it is said to tell?"

"A woman and her child were lost here; that is true, and sad enough for all the truth," returned Raymond. "How they got here, without light or guide (if they did so), is strange enough, but having done so, it is small wonder that they were lost here. Although *I* could find my way hence, blindfold, to the outer air, almost as quickly, perhaps, as another with a torch, yet one unaccustomed to the place might easily fail to do so. The very narrowness of the way, and the close neighbourhood of the stream, which ought in reality to insure escape, would confuse the wits of a poor terrified creature, with a little one in her arms too."

"Then Guy, you think, was not to blame?"

"I do not know, Mildred. He had enough to answer for—if a tenth of the tales about him be true—without this double murder. At all events, as the bodies were found and buried, it is impossible to adopt the vulgar story that this is the petrification of them, even if it were a petrification at all, as it manifestly is not."

"It was this imputed crime, however, that is said to have brought the curse upon the Clyffards, is it not?"

"My dearest Mildred, why be so solicitous about these *It is said*?"

"I really have a reason for my question, Raymond."


"Well, then, it is true that from the period when this sad incident took place, five generations back—for we are but a

short-lived family—the eldest son of our race has never inherited Clyffe—has always, in a word, been Mad. But we came here to talk of a worse thing than madness, Mildred—of the wicked deceit of one that is in her right mind, such as it is.”

“I fear so, Raymond. Nay, since I saw you, I—I almost fear that she has enmeshed Rupert.”

“Nay, impossible,” exclaimed the young man vehemently. “A more noble heart than Rupert’s does not beat; a nature more simple, guileless”——

“And therefore,” interrupted Mildred earnestly, “one only too easily made prey of. Rupert and she have some understanding between them, even now—of that I am certain. She will set brother against brother, if she can, be sure.”



"She never will, Mildred. Let her hoodwink him never so much, one word from his old playmate, lover, brother—Tush, why, the dear lad has only me to lean on; he comes to me as the very physician of his being; and while I live, he shall find me faithful, taking his love for fee, and even if not so requited, faithful still."

"Kind, generous Raymond, I am sure of that! Yet what hearts are so bound together, but that a false tongue can cut them asunder?"

"Ours, Mildred, ours," he whispered, pressing his lips to hers; and "Ours" murmured she again with loving gratitude.

"You make me happy, credulously happy, Raymond, in spite of myself. Nothing, indeed, can come between such love as ours;

the very hint would make a foe of him that spoke it. But friendship however close, and though cemented by one blood, is not so firm—even a tale-bearer, a mere malicious fool, can loosen it; while little by little the serpent tongue can always sap it with its poisoned lies. A while ago, did not your father love you? Did it then seem possible that a day would come when you would welcome a summons to his private chamber merely to take his evening meal with him, with a great leap of joy, as a rare favour, as you did this very morning? And if a father's heart can be so estranged, why not a brother's?"

"'Tis justly argued, Mildred," answered the young man fondly; "and what you say is dear to me, being the logic of love; but your sweet solicitude for me makes you

blind as Cupid himself. My father is an old man—alas! that I should have to say it—misruled by a young wife. But what hold can Mrs. Clyffard have on Rupert, that he should believe her, speaking lies against his own brother?”

“She may make him jealous, Raymond.”

“Jealous!” echoed the young man, turning pale as the white column beside him—“jealous, of what? of whom? Not, Heaven forefend, of thee, Mildred?”

“I say not of what, dear Ray,” answered she hastily; “only beware! I know not what vile plots may be going on against us. That which I do know, and which I am come here to tell, is vile enough, and may well prepare us for what might otherwise seem incredible and monstrous. The

‘Fair Lady’ of Clyffe, of whom such terrible things are told, at whose name your father’s melancholy deepens, and your brother shudders, has only a too real existence.”

“What! my Mildred superstitious? This is sad indeed.”

“Nay, I do not speak of spirits, Raymond. This ‘Fair Lady’ is Aunt Grace herself, and bodes more harm to you and yours than ever did bird or banshee.”

“What mean you, Mildred?”

“I mean the very words I say. Mrs. Clyffard is trading on the foolish superstitions of your house. She has tricked your father—Heaven grant it may not be so deeply but that he may be undeceived—not only by fostering within him the credulity that is his bane, but by masquer-

ading, acting the very part of her of whom he stands in fear. She appears to him as that very spectre; ay, indeed she does. When she heard from her own people—and of *my* blood, alas, alas!—that Cyril was greatly worse, and like to die, she played the ghost to her own husband. I suspected this before; but until you told me how Clement had been frightened in the Blue Chamber, I could not be quite sure.”

“And how should that make you sure, Mildred?”


“Because that room is the fittest of all for such a trick. Your father is so ready to believe the thing, and so unsuspicious of the only person who could, or would, so cruelly deceive him, that any place or time would serve her turn with him. But Clement, who believes nothing, but only

fears, and who has good cause besides for mistrust of his sister, could not be fooled so easily. Now, listen, Ray. When first I came to Clyffe, my aunt, meaning, perhaps, to make me wholly hers, a willing instrument of all her plots and plans, or, partly perhaps in boast, to shew how she was all in all with your poor father, disclosed to me several things which perhaps she now wishes she had concealed. Among other matters, she confided to me certain secrets of the house, unknown to either Rupert or yourself, but which had been revealed to her by your father. Let not that fret you, Ray; he doubtless kept them from you, well judging there was too much mystery about the place already. However, so it was, that while the household and yourselves knew where the priests were hid in the evil

times, between the double flooring of the bedroom in the North Tower, and how the panel in the Long Gallery slides aside with grim Sir Bevis' legs upon it, yet none but the Master and his wife knew of the Priest's Chamber within the chimney of the Blue Room. A man may sound the wainscots, and fasten all the doors, and think himself secure from interlopers, and yet his enemy may be in hiding within a foot of him as he sits by the inhospitable hearth. Sir William, who was wont to lie with pistols beneath his pillow, was fallen upon and slain, she told me, by these means; and thereby, I am right sure, did Aunt Grace gain access to the Blue Room last night, and hem the sheet, which it is no wonder that her brother took for a shroud. As for the falling of the floor, Clement doubt-

less spoke truth in that; a hinge scarce visible, save to attentive eyes, runs across the polished planks; nay, more, the floors of the two disused rooms beneath are similarly provided, so that if the Clyffard would kill his guest, he had only to withdraw a bolt or two, and the victim fell a sheer thirty feet upon the stones of the guard-chamber. Aunt Grace knew that Clement would never have the courage to leave his bed, or she would scarcely have ventured to that length with him. She holds my memory as cheaply as my mind, else it is somewhat rash in her, being my enemy and yours, to forget that she was once my patroness, and condescended to let me know so much."

If Mrs. Clyffard could have seen this girl as her bosom rose and fell with indignant




passion, and her form trembled, but not with fear, she would have despised her niece no longer, but have taken shield as well as spear. Thalestris herself was defied by the erst obedient Lampeto, when that which was dearer than her life was threatened by the imperious queen.

“Dear Ray, there is no time to lose,” continued Mildred; “Aunt Grace designs to strike a blow to-night which it behoves us to anticipate. She will repeat her stage-play this very night, as I believe; and if so, we must take your father behind the scenes. At supper, strive to move him all you can; tell him how honest is your heart towards him, and how his mind is warped by evil influence from—— Hush! quiet! Heaven help us, some one has entered the cave. I saw a gleam of light yonder.”

“Not so, Mildred; you are excited, and imagine things that have no existence. I told old Angus that no visitors were to be shewn the place this afternoon, under any circumstances. Well, and when I have warned my father—all in vain, I fear—what then?”

“When you hear the great organ in the gallery play *Achieved is the Glorious Work*, bid him follow you through the turret-door and out upon the roof. Tell him that if you fail to prove your words by what he shall there behold with his own eyes, you are content to fall without the pale of his good favour for the future. Trust to me, Ray: he shall see that which will wreck his confidence in this false woman, who makes so certain of thy ruin, dear one, at once and for ever. *Then* tell him—



By Heaven, there is the light again! I see your brother's shadow. If he finds us here together, all is lost—all, all! She overheard our tryst, and has betrayed us."

"I know not the reason of your sudden terror, Mildred; but I know you are wise and true to me," whispered Raymond in hurried but earnest accents. "All shall not be lost, love; nor shall I be lost"—

"What! you would not tempt that dreadful passage twice? moreover, he would see the glimmer of thy torch."

"Ay, but not thus;" he cast the flaming pine-branch into the dark stream, which quenched it on the instant, and plunging in himself, followed the blackened wood as it was sucked beneath the frowning arch.

Mildred uttered one sharp scream; for her lover was gone from her, without even a farewell kiss, and now, may be, was battling with black death: but the next instant, with a mighty effort, she decked her ghastly face with a set smile, like a counterfeit wreath upon a tombstone, and turned it to meet Rupert Clyffard.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HEIR'S SECRET.

RUPERT entered the "Cathedral" running, although necessarily at a stoop, by reason of the lowness of the adit, and casting one hasty glance at Mildred, began, without speaking, to search the vast apartment torch in hand. There was the same restless expression in his eyes, which had struck a momentary terror in the girl that very morning, combined with a passion such as she had never seen in him before. But she was not frightened now. What fear was in her was for Raymond; was he safe in

the spacious gloom of Finis Hall? or was the relentless stream carrying his beloved form, inanimate, bruised, disfigured, into the recesses of the hill? For the moment, she intensely hated his brother, who had thus driven him to take so perilous a step; and perfect hate, like love, casteth out fear. Moreover, fully convinced that in concert with her wily aunt, Rupert had basely tricked her in their previous conversation, she was inclined to imagine that he was still playing a part. Although, therefore, he ran to and fro about the chamber in a strange wild way, and muttered to himself in anger, she stood firm, watching him in contemptuous silence, and when he came close to her, having thoroughly explored the place, and menacingly shaking his torch in her very face, exclaimed, "Where is he?"

Where is he hiding his false face?" she returned his eager look with one of scorn.

"Who is it you seek?" said she. "Whose face is it that Rupert Clyffard ventures to call 'false?' He who in league with a heartless woman plotted against an unprotected girl, to steal her heart with lies. Nay, you waste your fierce looks upon me, sir; *I* am not your vassal; your gentle blood I hold as nothing without gentle deeds. Why do you track me hither, and force your company upon me when I need it not; nay, more, sir, when I loathe it?"

He looked at her with suspicious cunning, and uttered but a single word—"Raymond?"

"He is not here," returned she coldly. "You have seen for yourself, have you not?"

Like one upon whom conviction is forced against his will, Rupert answered peevishly, "And yet she told me he was here."

"Have you never known her to tell a falsehood?" returned Mildred disdainfully. "When you dropped your kerchief in the moat to-day"—

"Ay," interrupted Rupert simply, and passing his hand across his forehead, "I remember that. That was the signal we agreed upon—your aunt and I—so soon as you had given your promise to be mine, I was to drop the kerchief; sweet Mildred—and you gave it."

"I, Rupert? Never! No, and I never will! How dare you tell me to my face I did? I do confess you fooled me with your dishonest, artful talk of 'Save my Reason,' so that I threw away some pity;



but my love, sir—be sure of this—will never be so wasted!”


“‘Dishonest—artful—talk,’” repeated Rupert slowly. “Do you think I made a mock of being mad?”

“I do; and that Aunt Grace set you on to do it.”

“She? Why, Mildred, think a little: would she not lock me up as she did Uncle Cyril, so that, after murdering Raymond, all would be hers? No; she must never know what you shall know, love, and that now. Nobody must know, Mildred—promise me that much, sweet heart; but Mistress Clyffard and that Clement—he with the cruel eyes—those must know least of all. Sit you down here, and listen to me a little.”

He pointed to two slabs of glittering spar,

like thrones of frosted silver; and she sat down on one, and he upon the other, close beside her. She obeyed him involuntarily; but if she had given herself time to think, she would have obeyed him still; the same idea had now seized upon her respecting Rupert's sanity as had taken possession of her before; she acquitted him of having previously deceived her; and once more, though her heart was by no means free from fear, it had room for tenderest pity. But what made her more compliant than all was this, that while he was last speaking, she had heard a certain far-off sound which convinced her of the safety of her lover. The swooning note of an Æolian harp could not have been fainter; but she knew that signal well, and her attentive ear had drunk it in—the sweetest music it had ever listened



to—while Rupert, rapt in earnest speech, had not observed it.

“I will listen to you, Rupert,” said she kindly; “but speak like your honest self, and not what another has bidden you to say.”


“Mildred,” commenced the young man slowly and sorrowfully, “I had hoped that what passed this morning between us two would have spared me the confession I have now to make. I think it must have done so, had you loved me. You would then have credited what I said, and have known that there was more—and worse to say. The dark cloud that I told you seemed about to fall upon my being—soul, heart, and brain—has fallen already. It is not even in *your* power to avert it; but you may lift it up, Mildred. I am prison-bound,

but you have the master-key—you have indeed—that can undo my fetters, and set wide the door. Shake not your beauteous head, but look upon me tenderly—ay, so, and listen to my woe, if not my love. Dear Mildred, I am Mad. Start not, nor tremble, sweet heart; I am not so mad, nor ever shall be, that I should injure *you*. Not one shining hair but being yours is sacred to me as sacramental wafer to the priest; and as he worships it, and treats it reverently, so that all men should bow before it likewise, so do I worship you. Nay, you need not grudge me that poor favour, girl; it can harm you not, and I worship nothing else—not I, i'faith. I am like Guy in that—I love not chapel-going. While the priest is droning, droning, my fingers itch to strangle his fair throat; all chanting-time,

I sing my maddest songs; and when they kneel, I plant my face in the soft cushions, and make mocking mouths. Do not look so, Mildred; I can bear the pity of your eyes, but not the terror. It was for fear of this that I did not tell you all long, long ago, and only hinted at the horrid thing this morning. You believe me *now*, girl; that is well. I feared that I should have to laugh out loud; then nobody could doubt.

“I was not born a mad child. There was no band about my forehead, tight and hard as now, when I was very young; but gradually the thing has stolen on me, day by day, or rather night by night, as I should reckon, for it is at night, like a baleful flower, that madness grows. Ah! what nights I passed! Alone in the large bed-chamber

above the hall I used to lie—a ghastly nursery, Mildred, for a child like me. The woman that was my nurse, instead of tales of fairies and magicians, told me of Guy and of that dread shape—the statue yonder—which I had seen a thousand times before I beheld it here. Every night she promised to sit beside me to keep off the dreadful things, and every night she would put the candle to my face, and seeing me, as she thought, asleep, would leave me in the dark: then came the whispering voices, the soft rustling sounds, the stealthy footsteps round my little bed. Ah! what misery, Mildred, from the time of closing doors and loud good nights, when my father and the rest retired, until the blessed morning dawn! Above my room was one which no one occupied, as it was thought; but I knew



better. All night, one gibbered and moaned there, warming himself in the moonbeams as best he could, and shaking his chain for company. Once in the daytime I ventured thither, and though he was not there, I saw his chain fastened to the wall by a strong staple, as madmen always are by their sane brethren. This made me very cunning from the first. Only my father knew, and what he knew I think he has now forgotten. On a day when I thought myself unwatched, I had climbed up the winding stair of the West Tower—a weary way for my young limbs to go—and peering above the battlement, was about to execute a plan, long and fondly cherished, of leaping off into the air, when a strong arm was suddenly put around my waist, and I heard my father's voice. He was not angry, as I feared he might

be; he spoke me fair and very kindly, and carried me down stairs to save my little limbs; and while he did so, upon my face I felt his burning tears fall fast, which frightened me, not knowing why he wept. But I know now——”

“Alas! poor child,” murmured Mildred tenderly. “My heart bleeds for thee, Rupert.”

“She pities me, and does not fear!” he cried. “There is hope yet, then. The red-hot pain already hurts less keenly. I thank thee, blessed balm. Mildred, I have told you that the night is terrible to such as I am; but the morn is very sweet. My comfort comes with the first grey light that steals into my chamber, at which the phantoms vanish, and the mocking faces cease their gibes. A bird that loves the tree be-


neath my window, presently begins to sing—a rain of melody upon my parched-up soul. Then at the open window do I sit for hours, quite happy. The morning winds are ever blithe and joyous; out from the purple light they come that crowns this very hill. The pine-groves beckon them towards me; the cornfield, with ten thousand tossing ears, motions them on; and on they drive in music, and shed by my hair, and calm my throbbing pulse, and cool my fevered brain. Then mine eyes, looking on the dewy fields, themselves have dew in them—a something loosens at my heart, and then the dew—the sleeping farms, the river's stately flow, the wonder and the glory of the earth, sink deep into my soul."

"It cannot be," said Mildred, scarce know-



ing that she spoke aloud, "that such a mind as this has suffered total wreck."

"Ay, but it hath, it hath," returned he, earnestly. "I have only told you what I suffered as a boy—enough, as I see, for conviction, and yet not too much, as I hope, for loving pity. Let it suffice to say, that with every year the evil spirit has grown within me, and must one day gain the mastery altogether, if *you* will not cast it out. There is but one physician in all this world with power to heal me, Mildred. 'Tis you who are even as the morning dawn to me; and if you will but smile a little on me, the darkness will presently dissolve, and all will yet be day. I feel, I *know* it. See, I kneel before you, and entreat you—brave, kind heart—to give me your true love! Men often boast such love is life



to them; but to me, more than life; and if refused, a thing more bitter far than death awaits me."

He knelt before her on the silver sand, his fair face gentle and sad as the dewy eve, his thin white hands clasped close as anchorite's, his eyes fixed hungrily on hers. What *could* she tell him—for the truth she dared not tell—what answer could she give that neither would deceive him with false hopes, nor smite him where a blow would worse than slay?

"Rupert," said she, "you say that I am fair, and therein, as I believe, you tell me truth. A woman loves her loveliness very dearly; and yet I swear to you that I would straightway become misshapen and uncomely as yonder seeming statue, if by so doing I could lift the burden which you speak of

from your troubled mind, or help the grievous loss which Time and loving hearts may still, through God's sweet mercy, remedy. You are yet very young. At present, be content with my best sympathy: having confided to me this great grief, let me bear something of it; make me your priest, and I will do my best to shrive you, keeping your secret safe. Beware of evil counsels, and all evil: the Clyffards are not born mad more than other folks, but unbridled vice and wickedness made them what they are. Be good, be temperate, be honest—for by such means it is that men keep sane."

"And that is all the comfort you can give me now," said Rupert, sighing and rising from his seat. "God bless you, Mildred, for that much. Let us go home. I



am far better for this talk: your very voice, though speaking not the words which I would hear, is soothing as the harp which David played to pacify mad Saul."

As they moved slowly homeward, and before the glimmer of their torches had quite left the vaulted chamber, Raymond emerged dripping from the subterranean stream.

"What could Rupert have had to tell her," murmured he, "that he should follow her to Ribble Cave, and keep me dripping in the dark so long? A man less accustomed to otter-hunting and fishing in mid-stream, would have run the risk of—taking cold."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCENE THROUGH THE SKY-LIGHT.

THERE are some men, whom one cannot help envying, that will as readily execute a painful duty as confer a benefit or a pleasure; who feel no embarrassment whatever at having to say a disagreeable thing, and whose facility for managing unpleasant matters with a high hand should commend itself (and yet somehow fails to do so) to public admiration. There are others, again, who shrink from giving pain to their fellow-creatures, as from a surgical operation on themselves, not necessarily from high, or

even benevolent motives, but because their natures are sensitive, delicate, and selfish—who are moral Epicureans. Although Ralph Clyffard was a good man (as good men went in those days), he was one of these. He had a kind heart, and would have wounded nobody's feelings, if he could have helped it; but if somebody must needs be offered the cold shoulder, it was not likely to be that person upon whom his own happiness and comfort principally depended; it was likely to be that person least of all. Expediency and convenience, as well as dotting Fondness, all combined together to make his wife's will a law unto him, and to cause him to look coldly upon whomsoever she had cast out from her good graces. But, at the same time, he would never knowingly have committed an injustice

to please her; and it was very painful to him even to do what was harsh. Thus, when he invited his second son to sup with him in his own turret-chamber, with the object of telling him that he was not wanted at home, the master of Clyffe did not look forward to a pleasant evening. His conscience pricked him, and the milk of human kindness flowed forth from the wound towards poor Raymond. Throughout the interview, he was patient in listening to what the young man had to say for himself; and even when that defence took something of the form of accusation of Mrs. Clyffard herself, he suffered him to say on.

“I do not deny, son Raymond,” rejoined the old man, pacing the little chamber to and fro with his hands behind him, “that you

have something to complain of. Your step-mother has, I fear, been somewhat imperious; while you, Ray, on the other hand, are not of a conciliatory disposition. There are troubles enough threatening this house without the continuance of this unnatural dissension—I cannot bear it. I have come to the conclusion that, for the present at least, it would be better that you should absent yourself: travel is an excellent thing for a young man of your age; spend, therefore, the next few months or a year abroad. When you were quite a lad, you used to be very ambitious of military honours—what say you to a commission in His Majesty's Foot Guards? Money, my dear Ray, you may be sure, will never be a subject upon which we shall disagree. At my death, you will at once succeed to your mother's

little portion, and thrice as much again. I have not forgotten you in my will, Ray; and in the meantime—I wish you to want for nothing—here are notes to a considerable amount”——

“What! father; am I to leave Clyffe at once? Even a servant is not thus turned out of doors without warning!”

“Nay, lad, I meant not that: a week hence, nay, a month, if you will have it so; there shall be no haste, no harshness. There are arrangements to be made, of course, friends to be written to, interest to be made.”

Raymond looked at his father with a sad and pitying smile; he was not angry, though deeply grieved; he well knew that the old man was mentally contending, not with *him*, but with another not then present.

Ralph mistook his glance. "Is the money not enough, good lad? Then let me double it. Heaven knows, I have grudged thee nothing."

"Nothing but your love, father," returned the young man reproachfully; "and now you have it not to give me. I trust that she who has won it all away from me, may not requite you ill for so much good-fortune."

"Raymond, you do me wrong; I love you, boy: how should I not have love for my own son?"

"Ay, how should you not?" returned the young man bitterly. "The babe you danced upon your knee so often—your black birdie? The child you took before you upon your pommel for many a breezy ride? The boy whose light-hearted laugh, you said, was

the only music you cared to listen to? How should you not, indeed? And yet you have forgotten all these things?"

"No, Ray, no—I have not forgotten them," answered the old man hurriedly, patting the stripling's head with his great hand. "You are still very dear to me; you are indeed. Dear Ray!—dear Ray! Never weep, lad; that is not like a Clyffard."

"Who has seen me weep, save you?" returned the young man passionately. "But I have a heart, which some have not, believe me, who can weep when they please."

Ralph Clyffard knit his brows. "Hush!" said he; "that is Mildred playing the organ in the gallery, is it not? How grandly it swells forth into the summer night; some-

thing divine seems gathering in my soul, yet not without pain." He placed his hand upon his heart, and sighed, then listened in silence, with his eyes turned to the unshuttered window and the darkling sky.

"Father, since I am to leave you," continued Raymond earnestly, "I trust that you will listen to a few last words, which may be the very last that will ever pass between us."

"They may be indeed," returned the old man, still gazing on the night. "The time is drawing near when I shall be but a memory to you, Raymond; then think upon me as tenderly as you can."

"Say not so, father; you are yet strong and hale; I trust there are many happy years"——

"Happy!" interrupted the Master of Clyffe with quiet scorn: "how should a Clyffard, having a son, be happy? I speak not of you, Ray: your light and wayward nature may be somewhat out of tune with mine, and may vex and anger others; but there is nothing in *you* to cause the current of a father's blood to freeze."

"Nor in Rupert either," answered the young man resolutely, while the organ pealed and thundered; "although it may be some one's interest to make his father think so. What I would say to you, father, has reference to this very matter, and are words of warning, not of hate, upon mine honour."

"Being thus pressed, I cannot refuse thee, Raymond; yet remember that it is the last draught which leaves its flavour

on the palate, and men who would be praised for their good wine, offer not their friends its lees at parting. My heart is towards you, Raymond; it is indeed. I pray you turn it not away just as we are about to separate."

"That must be light love, father, which is so lightly lost," returned the young man sorrowfully; "and though I prize it—being all that I may claim, it seems—yet will I risk its forfeiture. If I tell you lies, I will give you leave to hate me; nay, if I do not prove that I speak truth, then you shall hate me still."

"Prove what, Raymond?" asked the old man with kindling eyes. "Trust me, having said so much, though it grows near to midnight, and I need my rest, you shall say all."

Above his hoarse deep tones the organ, "yearning like a god in pain," was heard tumultuous.

"I will prove then, father, that the sad story of our race, and of its curse, has been made the handle of deceit and fraud; that the vision which you have seen so often is no illusion indeed, but worse, the cruel trick of a guileful woman; that the Fair Lady of Clyffe"—(*Achieved is the Glorious Work* here broke forth jubilant and full, and stormed about their ears in wild acclaim)—"that the haunter of our house, is flesh and blood; nay, is the woman whom you have made your wife, to dupe and fool you—— Strike, father, if you will, but listen. Nay, then, do but use your eyes!" Raymond opened a little door in the Turret-chamber, which gave upon the castle

leads, and flung it wide. "Follow me," cried he; "and cast me down upon the stones of yonder courtyard if I do not prove my words!"

With hasty and uneven steps, his hair streaming in the autumn wind, his bronzed face pale with rage, and expectation of he knew not what, the Master of Clyffe followed close upon his younger son. The moon was small, and hidden at times by the flying clouds; but there was light enough from it and from the stars to shew the vast expanse of roofing, diverse in form as any frozen sea—here level, there ridged; here rising four-square, and there shooting into pinnacles and gables. The various periods of the stately place were pictured there to the antiquarian eye in horizontal section; not a ray from within was to be

seen save in one spot, to which they were rapidly drawing near; this shone through a sequestered sky-light, set in the right angle, formed by the junction of two towers. Three hideous gargoyles leaned from their stone bases, as though to peep down at the scene below, and grinned approval.

"One moment, father," cried Raymond, laying his hand upon his arm: "I have staked all on this, and must go through with it; but it is for your sake I have done it, as much, ay, more than for my own. You have a right to look there; but though she were Jezebel herself, I would not play the spy without her husband's leave. That is Mrs. Clyffard's private chamber, sir."

"She is not up," returned the old man

hoarsely; "she bade me 'good night' ere you joined me at the supper-table."

"She *is* up, father: that is her light, burning as bright and purely as though it were an altar-candle in the chapel yonder. She is dressing for her part to-night. Look! look!"

For an instant the Master of Clyffe leaned heavily upon the shoulder of his son; then with a great effort he strode forward rapidly, but firmly, and gazed down through the sky-light upon what was passing in the room beneath. For a few moments there he stood, unmoving, with eyes that devoured the scene; then over his face a shadow fell, as falls on him who, at the grave's mouth, looks his very last upon the wife he loves; and uttering one great cry of anguish, he pressed his

hand against his broken heart, and fell backward.

Raymond sprang toward him, and, as he did so, could not but see that which had so moved his father. In a small room, windowless save for the sky-light which had betrayed her, stood Mrs. Clyffard, with her eyes cast upward in terror and dismay; they had met her husband's downward gaze at the very moment when she, in the quaint black robe in which she was wont to play her guileful part, and with her black hair loose, and fallen to her waist, was practising her *rôle* before the tire-glass. The shroud was in one hand, and needle and thread in the other, while her face wore a look of triumphant malice, which would have unmasked the foul fiend himself, though clad in angelic garments. One

instant, she stared upward as though spell-bound, and then quenched the light.

Mrs. Clyffard had not seen her husband fall; but there were some precious minutes before her yet, she knew. Swiftly she entered the next chamber, which ~~was~~ her own, and ~~seizing~~ a large jewel-case from the dressing-table, emptied its glittering contents into her pocket: from a small locked drawer in the same table she took a leathern purse, filled tightly with bank-notes. "I did not dream when I began this hoard," she muttered, "that the day whereon to use it was so near, or it would have been thrice as large." Had the day really come? Was the game quite lost? She paused upon the threshold of her chamber, and worried her own fair lips with her sharp teeth. Yes; utterly lost. The expres-

sion of her husband's face had been unmistakable—faith shattered, love misplaced, unutterable pain and shame, had been all pictured there. He had been undeceived with a vengeance. That other form, too, she had seen was Raymond's—her sworn enemy; it was to him, doubtless, that she was indebted for this evil turn. She had been baffled, beaten by that hateful boy. That was the bitterest draught in all the cup. How came he wandering on the leads at midnight in that fashion? So doubtless, however, it had happened, and seeing what he saw, he had brought his father to look likewise. Curse the cunning boy! And yet, was she not herself to blame, running the risk she did, however small, of such unmitigable ruin. Why had she not put up a blind? Why have used a light at all? Could

Mildred have betrayed her? Her fair face blackened at the thought. No, she dared not have done it. Her trembling fingers, had she been privy to the scheme, could never have beaten out those organ thunders, which even now were swelling through the house. She was still playing, and therefore her aunt could not make exit, as she had meant to do, through the great gallery. She opened another door, and went out thence. She did not wish to meet a human being; she would leave Clyffe and all it held, and begin life again elsewhere. She was fair as ever, and not poor, as she had been at first—but alas! here was Rupert coming, and at speed, in the narrow passage; there could be no avoidance of him. “Make haste!” cried he—“quick—quick!” He spoke impatiently, and seemed scarce to

know to whom he was speaking; or perhaps he already knew all, and addressed her thus imperiously, as one upon whom courtesy and all fair-dealing would be thrown away. "Quick, I say; my father is ill—is dying; bring a—a——" Running towards her in hot haste, calling thus, both speech and motion seemed to fail him all upon a sudden: with mouth agape with terror, and eyes starting from their sockets, he stood dumb; then, shrinking from before her with fear and loathing, as from some terrible and unclean thing, he turned and fled.

For a moment, Grace Clyffard watched him with irresolute eyes. "I forgot my strange attire," she murmured: "the fool takes me for the Fair Lady; he thinks I am the harbinger of death. How were it

if I really be so? 'My father is dying,' said he. Perhaps his heart has killed him, as he always thought it would. If so, all may yet be well. My word is as good as Raymond's. Who will believe an idle tale like this, vouched for but by a dead man and a boy? I will put by this masquerading gear, and play my own part of a tender wife once more. If I have the smoothing of Ralph Clyffard's pillow, another dawn shall never trouble his vexed soul again."

Hastily she put away her black garment in a safe and secret place, and attired herself in the dress she had worn that evening; then, stepping forth into the now vacant gallery, took the way that led to the chamber where her husband had supped,


The Scene through the Skylight. 279

and whence the sound of many voices and
the tramp of many feet could now be
heard.

CHAPTER XV.

OVER THE BODY.

IN the same room where father and son had talked together of parting but a few minutes back, Ralph Clyffard lay upon a little couch, with Raymond kneeling by his side. Another sort of parting than that of which they had spoken was taking place, and the stiffening fingers could not even return the lad's mute pressure in token of farewell. The mighty chest of the Master of Clyffe still rose and fell, but in uneven spasms, as though his gloomy soul was



struggling to flit away. Around stood many a serving man and maid, summoned by that mysterious messenger Misfortune, that flies so swift and far, and to whom the night is as the day. Scarce one of them had ever before ventured to intrude upon his privacy, but now they watched him with reverence, but without fear, setting forth upon that journey which rich and poor must alike make. One groom had already been despatched for a doctor, another for a priest; but somehow it was known to all that their lord would never open his proud eyes again. They had been kind eyes, for all their pride—the voice, now hushed for ever, had been a gracious one to all his household. Some honest tears were falling. There had never, at least, been so good a Clyffard as this last.



"Where is my brother Rupert?" asked Raymond huskily.

"I told him what had happened, sir," returned a domestic respectfully; "and he threw on his dressing-gown, and started hither as soon as I. He took the passage by my lady's room, meaning to call her by the way—— But here is my lady, sir."

Mrs. Clyffard entered very swiftly, with her dress only half fastened, and her hair dishevelled, like one suddenly aroused in her preparations for retiring to bed. "What is the matter?" cried she.


No one answered, but all made way for her; and it was strange to see how all became conscious at once of their relative positions, now that the mistress had arrived. Some even left the room, awakened to the

consciousness of having no business there, and fearing sharp rebuke. Quite a great space was left between the half-circle of curious domestics and the couch where the young man was still kneeling by his father's side. Had Raymond spoken against her yet, or had her husband had voice to speak? Had the servants withdrawn thus suddenly at her approach from loathing or from respect?

"What has happened to my own dear husband?" murmured she, falling upon her knees beside his pillow.

"Murder!" returned Raymond, under his breath.

She did not hear him so much as see the movement of his lips, but even without that his stern reproachful eyes would have given her the like answer.



"My poor, poor Ralph!" exclaimed the widow—for death was already setting that Blank, which is its signature to our release from all worldly cares, upon the slowly-stiffening face—"and am I only here in time close to thine eyes!"


"Touch him not!" hissed Raymond fiercely. "Have you not heard that, when a murdered man is touched by the vile hand that slew him, the blood will flow afresh from his drained wounds? Beware, I say! Lay but a finger on his sacred brow, which you have helped to wrinkle, and I will take you by the throat, and proclaim your crime!"

He had not, then, at present proclaimed it: the precious time this fool had wasted were golden moments to her indeed. An accusation thus delayed was already robbed

of half its danger. Why had Raymond spared her?

"For my father's sake," said the young man, answering through his set teeth her unspoken question, "I have spared you hitherto: not because I love you—you fair devil!—but that I would not the world should know how this great and noble heart was fooled.—Where is Rupert, woman?"

For the first time in her life, Grace Clyffard quailed and shuddered; the concentrated passion with which the young man spoke was terrible to listen to. She was armed at all points to meet Hate and Guile with their own weapons, but not the physical fury which was revealed in the tones of her stepson. She knew that she stood in danger of that awful Something whose shadow was on Rupert Clyff-



fard's face—that if she dared to insult that forehead—already losing its pained look, and growing calm and cold, with her false lips, Raymond would surely rise, and perhaps strangle her. She did not mind what things they might say against her—her chief peril in that respect was past—but she feared his powerful fingers. Once round her throat, they might not part with it again: it may be that she judged him by herself in that; but certainly dark Raymond had a look she well might fear. She had once seen Cyril at the Dene look at her brother Gideon much like that, just ere he strove to tear him limb from limb. She had no leaded weapon, as Gideon had, to beat such an assailant back.

“Away, away, fiend!” muttered her stepson furiously; “your presence is pollution—

your work is done here. That poor abused fond ear can drink in lies no more. Away, I say!"

Mrs. Clyffard arose from her knees with as little haste as she dared to use. As she did so, a female servant touched her on the shoulder: "Mr. Rupert is taken very ill, madam. Miss Mildred is with him, and has help, but she bid me tell you as soon as possible. She was coming hither herself, and came upon him lying upon the floor of the passage close by his own door, in a fit or something."

"Do you hear this new misfortune, Raymond?" sobbed Mrs. Clyffard.

"Ay, go you to my brother," returned the young man sternly.

And as she moved away with anguished but tearless eyes, and firm, swift tread, the

bystanders murmured to one another, "How wise and strong she is in all this trouble! How dutifully she leaves the beloved dead, for whom she can do no more, to tend the son who was so dear to him!"

"In a fit or something," soliloquised the Lady of Clyffe, as she hurried to Rupert's room. "Heaven forefend that I should have frightened the fool to death! My tenure of Clyffe is valueless indeed if it has to be shared by that dark boy yonder; yet even in such a case, I will be revenged upon him. He has missed his turn; but when *my* turn comes round, look to yourself, Raymond Clyffard! No man shall make me pale as you have done, and live to boast of it. I would that Gideon were here, or Cator, or even the poor coward

Clement. This Mildred is scarce safe; she serves me, but it is with grudging. If Rupert lives this bout, he must be married to her, mad or sane. If she denies him—let her, too, look to herself. I have not gone so far to turn back now; and though I be alone, I am yet a match for all of them!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EXTORTED PROMISE.


RUPERT CLYFFARD was very ill, and near to death; but for his stepmother's cunning hand, which bled him ere the leech could reach the castle, Raymond would surely have been heir of Clyffe; while afterwards the sick man would have sunk had it not been for her niece. Long weeks elapsed before his head could leave the pillow, where it lay calm and patient, while Mildred was in his chamber, and restless, with roving eyes, when she was absent. Her voice revived

his failing strength like wine; her hand upon his brow was as the magnetic charm which beckons away all pain, and as the precious drug which dowers the dullest with delicious dreams. It pleased her well to be of service to him; she gave up rest, and exercise, and pleasure beyond words to tell (for might not Raymond now have borne her company all day?), with cheerful readiness. She was glad at heart that she had such opportunities of proving her good-will towards him; she tended him like his own sister; and since she was not his sister, the Lady of Clyffe approved and smiled upon her. Such gentle ministering must, in her aunt's opinion, have, as her own had had, some selfish end; and what end could this be, save one alone? She never called her "child" now; it was "Mildred,

love," or at least "my pretty Mildred," whenever she addressed her niece in Rupert's hearing, as though she would have suggested to his mind the very words which he himself should use.


So helpless and enfeebled was poor Rupert at first, that the young girl thought of nothing but his weakness, and how she might conduce to his recovery. But when the colour came back to his cheeks, and some vigour to his limbs, and he could sit up and talk to her, Mildred almost regretted her past kindness. He was grateful to her, of course, but with his expressions of gratitude was mingled something warmer, which she could not affect not to understand, and yet which in Mrs. Clyffard's presence she dared not utterly reject. Though her aunt felt satisfaction at pre-

sent with her conduct, the girl well knew that only so much the greater would be her hate and fury when she came to learn the truth. Nor was Mildred to blame for this dissimulation. It was not a matter with which "moral courage" had anything to do. To have confessed, "I cannot wed Rupert, since I have pledged my faith to Raymond," would have been to produce a catastrophe such as she dared not even picture to herself, since its consequences would certainly have extended to her lover. She feared, with reason, for his very life; and so the poor girl temporised, only too well aware of the passion with which Rupert was consumed; yet trusting that the flame would never gain such head but that her "no" at last might quench it, or at all events procrastinate, as before,



the evil day. The young man's illness, while it weakened his physical strength, seemed to have healed his mental malady. There was nothing now to inspire her with apprehension in his look *beside* its love, and if returning reason had been indeed vouchsafed him, surely, with his natural generosity to second it, he would withdraw—when her dread hour of confession came—from his unwelcome suit. Something like this she framed to comfort herself with; but it scarcely fulfilled its office. She could not always forget how insecure was the foundation of this hopeful faith; for not only might Rupert's seeming calmness be untrustworthy, even as matters were, but a revelation was at present withheld from him, which was likely to try it sorely. He had not as yet been told of his father's

death. When given to understand that he was ill, he had received the information with quiet sorrow, but without surprise. "I know it," said he calmly, evidently with reference to the immediate cause of his own ailment, all allusion to which was of course avoided. He meant to say that he had seen the herald of Calamity in the Fair Lady of Clyffe, and was prepared for domestic misfortune. Still, it was strange that he never asked after his father—laid long since by the side of the Clyffards, mad and sane, in the chapel vault—nor remarked upon the sable suits of all around him. This was not, however, because he had not observed them. One morning, Mrs. Clyffard, doubtless by design, having left the room, and the sick man and Mildred being alone together, he addressed her thus.



It was the first day he was well enough to leave his bed, and that only for a sofa. "How soon, think you, after a man has died, may his son marry, Mildred?"


She was in the act of handing him a cup of broth, and her tremulous fingers almost refused their office, as she listened to his words.

"How soon, Mildred?" said he again.

"That is a question, Rupert, which I cannot answer. It depends upon the love that the son bore his father."

"I am thinking of one who would have loved his father well, if there had been room within his heart; but there was no room. There was space for nothing there but love for the girl who was to be his wife.—You tremble, dearest. Pretty fluttering dove. How soon, how soon, sweet

heart?" His languid eyes looked on her earnestly, but without a trace of doubt, as one who in an orchard watches for the ripe fruit to fall between his palms while another shakes the tree. "What sweet Revenge you have taken on yourself, for your pretence of cruel hardness, in this long kind tendance: to be my nurse before you are my bride—that is rare indeed. I will not think that Pain itself could shadow that fair brow, or shrink that dimpled cheek; but if it ever doth, my Mildred, I will wait upon you, day and night, counting all toil as pleasure, all weariness as blissful rest; and while you have strength to smile, be overpaid indeed. Smile on me now, and seat you by my side; for as some eastern king delights in hearing his own greatness proclaimed to his



own ear, so yearn I, Mildred, to hear you say, 'I love you,' although none knows you do so well as I." His nerveless hand closed on one glossy curl, and carried it to his lips: while, lapped no less in the sweet assurance of reciprocated love than in the calm content that comes to the recovering frame long racked by sickness, he waited for her answer.


"Rupert," said she, "I thought that the last time we spoke of—the last time, that is, this subject was touched upon by you, we agreed to wait a while before it was resumed. When I then said, 'You are still very young, Rupert,' I did not mean too young by weeks or even months, but years."

"Am I so young, dear girl?" said he, with a tender smile. "I thank Heaven for

it. There will be then more time in which to show my love to you. How happy shall we be together, and how long! Youth is sweet—ah me, how sweet it is!—and after youth there is the Prime; and then beyond the Prime is that which I have read is best of all—the calm content of tried and faithful love; two hearts bound up in one, with joys, regrets, and memories in common. My Bud, my full-bloomed Flower—my Rose, whose faded leaves (if you *can* fade) shall be odorous and precious to the end, ah, how I love you!” .

Mildred's heart sank within her. If she had been his wedded wife already, the young man could scarcely have uttered these words with a more settled faith.

“Why speak of this, which we were not to speak of, Rupert?”



“Because, sweet, there is no longer any reason for keeping silence. I am the Master of Clyffe now, and there is none to say me ‘nay,’ when I say ‘yea.’ Moreover, I have learned that my good father gave his consent in private to our union, so the very dead will smile upon our nuptials; while your Aunt Grace—— Nay, then, I will not mention her, since you dislike her, but she has been a trusty friend to me, Mildred. When the light of love was low within my cheerless heart, she fanned its embers with encouragement; not that she knew why they were so faint and pale; not that she guessed the secret—Ah, *you* have not forgotten it, I see. I hoped you had, Mildred. There is no need to remember it any more. By you, fair saint, that demon has been exorcised, I hope.”

His voice, so confident hitherto, though low and weak, here wavered and broke off. His hand, which he would have carried to his forehead, failed by the way, and sank down, as it happened, upon hers; then straightway, as though revived, Antæus-like, by that sweet contact, he spoke again. "She bade me woo you, since I loved you so—that surely was no evil counsel, Mildred? and when I found you cold, she bade me press my suit—did she not do well? 'Twas she that sent you to me on that morning to her private chamber"—

"I knew it," interrupted the girl gravely; "and sent you, too, to Ribble Cave to spy upon your brother."

"Mildred!"

"Ay, Rupert: she came between Raymond and his own father, and now she would

come between Raymond and you. She is the Go-between of hate, and not of love; her offices are evil, and not good. The tender mercies of the Wicked, Rue, are cruel."

"She is not cruel to me, Mildred, but kind," returned the young man; "and strange it is that, though she stands not in your favour, it is for your sake only that she stands in mine. For *her* I have no more liking than the sailor hath for the biting north wind, whose favouring gale is bearing him to the wished-for haven. She would wreck me, if it suited her purpose, I doubt not; but since her interest and my happiness are fellow-passengers"—

"Be not so sure of that, Rupert Clyffard," broke in Mildred earnestly. "Beware lest there is no pleasant shore awaiting you,

no isles of Paradise—beware rather lest she is driving you on the rocks. If she has represented what poor tendance I have paid you in this sickness in any other light than that of sisterly affection and good-will—if she has dared, whether by hint, or by outspoken word, to plight my troth to yours, to proxy-wed me, then has she deceived both me and you—nay, more, if she has ever told you that I love you, she has *lied!*” Her tone, which had been vehement and almost fierce, here melted into pity, as she added, “Rupert, I love you not!”

Stupefied amazement, wretchedness, despair, took each the other's place on Rupert's features as the girl went on; when she had finished, he lay with his white face blank, as though life and passion had left it together. Seriously alarmed, Mildred

seized his cold hand, and strove to warm it in her palms; the charm of her touch still worked; the lifeblood which had ebbed from his very lips, flowed slowly back; and in the rayless eyes a fierce and lurid light began to kindle. Twice his parched tongue essayed to utter something, but she could not catch its meaning: the third time he spoke plain. "Send me the traitress hither. Let her take your place, and lean above me with her lying smile. I want to whisper something in her ear. Send me that woman hither."

"Hush, hush! I hear her coming, Rue; be calm."

"Calm! with those words of doom still ringing in my ears? Calm—ay; as the tropic sea is calm, beneath whose waveless face the shark awaits the swimmer. Give

her your chair, Mildred—you who love me not.”

“You will not tell her, Rupert; that would be base indeed.”

“Tell her—ay; just one whisper in her ear. Then, afterwards, you may tell her what you like. I have got some news for her to take to Pluto.”

“Dear Rupert, for my sake, do her no harm,” pleaded Mildred in an agony of terror. “When I said I loved you not, I meant, not *yet*!”

Revenge and Cunning, which had held divided sway in the sick man’s face, here abdicated together; Hope for one moment sat there like a sun, and then was succeeded by Suspicion.”

“I do not believe you, Mildred Leigh,” answered he fiercely; “nor will, unless you swear it!”

"Swear it?" echoed Mrs. Clyffard, entering the room. "Heyday, but I must look to this! My Mildred put upon her oath! When *I* was young, it was the man who swore, whereby, if troth was broken, *he* was perjured, but the lady was held blameless. There is no such courtesy in these days. Shame upon you, Rue!"

She stood beside the two, with one small hand on either's shoulder.

"It is not I who am to blame," said Rupert hoarsely. "Fair mother, will you not sit?"

"Nay," returned Mildred hastily; "you have not taken your broth yet. Let me tend you a little longer; Mrs. Clyffard has been your nurse all day."

"So, so," said the lady of Clyffe with a silver laugh; "this is pushing us from our stools indeed! You tell me frankly

what I am to expect, when Clyffe shall change its mistress. It was not troth that you were plighting, then? The question was 'How soon?' Am I not right, dear Rupert?"

"Ay, I asked her that."

"And what was the reply?" quoth Mrs. Clyffard, pressing her hand with meaning against Mildred's shuddering flesh. "A month? I guessed it was a month. Come; since my modest Mildred will not answer you, I will answer for her. In a month, she shall be yours, Rupert."

"I must hear it from her own lips, good mother; you prophesy too smoothly."

Mrs. Clyffard's fair face darkened; matters were not, then, as they had seemed. Mildred had refused him, or procrastinated at least. The young girl's face was buried in

her hands, but not to hide its blushes; it was as pale as marble.

Grace Clyffard's soft voice hardened; it was music still, but clear, incisive, as the clash of cymbals. "I do not pretend to be a prophet, Rupert; you wrong me there; but what I *promise*—that will come to pass. My niece shall be your wife; and as for her scruples about time, that is a maiden's way."

"From her own lips, I say," repeated Rupert hoarsely.

"Swear then, niece Mildred—I pray you, find your voice—to wed the Clyffard within thirty days."

Never was deadly menace clothed so fair; never did spoken words convey more cruel meaning than was shot from those azure eyes.


Fear for Raymond's safety, threatened, as it seemed to her, in every tone of her aunt's voice; fear on her own account, which always overwhelmed her when brought face to face with Mrs. Clyffard; pity for Rupert, and terror as to what violence he might commit upon the instant, if she should answer "No"—for she had read Murder in his eyes a while ago—overcame the resolution which had hitherto supported Mildred. Keeping her face still covered, and murmuring a "God forgive me" to herself, she answered solemnly, "I swear."

"Swear what?" asked Mrs. Clyffard pitilessly.

"I swear to marry your stepson within thirty days."

*

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





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